South Haven Tribune

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Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

Adam DeBoer began his career in 2004 as an officer at the South Haven Police Department and worked his way up to chief. He said he changed his major to criminal justice after taking part in a ride along back in college.

On the radar

DeBoer shares his law enforcement journey in SH

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — After more than a year without a permanent police chief, South Haven appointed Adam DeBoer, elevating a homegrown officer with roots in the department and community.

The search for a permanent chief began in September of 2024 after the previous chief, Natalie Thompson, retired.

After two people accepted and in a short amount of time resigned from the position, DeBoer took over as interim chief in mid-2025 and was later named the permanent police chief.

DeBoer recently sat down with South Haven Tribune Editor Julie Newell to discuss his life and goals as the city's police chief.

Where are you from?

Born and raised in Zealand. Spent a little time in Allendale when I was in college and then came right down here in 2004.

Where did you go to college?

Graduated from Grand Valley State Academy, Grand Valley State Police Academy in August of 2004. Went there out of high school, swam two years on their varsity swim team. And then after that, decided I needed to focus more on academics and less on swimming. So, I stopped swimming my junior year.

Initially, I was going to be a PE teacher and then I changed to psychology major with an emphasis in child psychology. Then Chief Edwardson retired from Wyoming PD and was my CJ 101 professor. Then toward the middle of the class, I asked him about a ride along, or, you know, exploring more about it. He set me up with a ride along, took me out to lunch. I had a great ride along in Wyoming and was hooked. The next day, I went back and changed my major to CJ (criminal justice).

Did you always want to go into law enforcement?

No intention at all of doing law enforcement, (it) wasn't even on my radar. Back when I told my mom, she was like, "You're going to do what?" She wasn't all that excited about it. No real family history in law enforcement. However, on my mom's side, she had, I think she had five siblings. One of my aunts, didn't have any boys, so four of my aunts and uncles had sons, and each one of those families have someone in law enforcement.

We went from no law enforcement 30 years ago to a lot of law enforcement in the family.

Where did you start working in law enforcement after graduating?

I started here. (I) came out of the academy in 2004, the hiring was not the way it is now, it was very hard to get a job. South Haven still had their seasonal program. I did not start at seasonal because we got out of the academy in August – the seasonal program was already well underway for the summer. I applied all over the state, out of state, just looking for a job.

I was freshly married, had a daughter who was almost a 1-year-old at the time and South Haven had an opening, so I rode down here with a couple buddies from the Holland area that were also in my graduating class. We all took the test together. There were two spots that they were hiring for and they had over 90 people test. We don't even do a test now because we don't have that many people applying. So we just go with an interview and enroll from there. I got hired.

I started here in October of 2004, I went into SWET – the Southwest Enforcement Team – as a narcotics detective in '08, worked that until 2011 and then in about the middle of 2013, I went into our detective spot. So, I was doing all the follow-up in investigations for the police department until 2017.

In January of 2017, I went back to the road, finally made it to day shift. In September of 2017, I got promoted to sergeant and I went right back to night shift. Then I was a sergeant on nights until 2024. July of 2024 I finally made it to day shift. July of '24 I went to days and then took the interim chief role in May of 2025. I've done my whole career here in South Haven.

It was my favorite spot. Being the night shift sergeant was my favorite spot. I got to do a lot of the police work still, which was very hands on. As a sergeant on the road, I was fortunate to have a lot of guys that like to do police work, so they got into a lot of stuff. We had a lot of fun. Took a lot of people to jail that needed to go to jail. I got to run it the way I wanted to run it. I think if you ask a lot of people, they would say the best part is that midnight sergeant spot, because you get to still be involved in police work.

Did you have any aspirations to become chief of police?

I think all of us coming out of the academy, like, have that plan of in 10 years. Did I see myself as a chief someday? Absolutely. Did I know it was going to be May of 2025? Absolutely not. (I'm) very happy that I took the interim spot, very happy that my guys supported me in that spot, and the city supported me in that spot and it was successful to end up where we are now in November and December and January. It's been great.

What kind of goals do you have as chief?

We're trying to modernize the department. We're in the middle of an accreditation process with the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police. With that comes a lot of software updates. I really want to bring back the community engagement. For a while there, we were really good at it and it kind of fell to the wayside, partly because we don't have that seasonal staff to help us in the summertime. But, we need to reengage with our community a little bit better.

See **DEBOER**, page A2

SH considers allowing members on multiple boards

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven City Council discussed introducing an amendment to the code of ordinances to allow a person to serve on more than one board or commission at the same time.

"It was brought to city staff's attention that we have a provision in our code of ordinances that prohibit folks from serving on the planning commission and any other board," City Manager Kate Hosier said Monday. "We currently have one member that serves on the planning commission, Larry Heinig, as well as the construction board of appeals."

Hosier said it has been difficult to fill vacancies on several boards and commissions over the years, especially ones that require members to have knowledge and experience in certain fields such as the construction board of appeals.

Council Member David Flack expressed his support for discussing the amendment, however, he also brought up some concerns that could come with making the change.

"I'm open to that discussion and that discussion involves, will we get more applicants if we make that move, yes or no?" Flack said. "Will we maintain the diversity that we want to have between the boards and within the boards if we make that move or will we concentrate the boards with fewer people?"

Council Member Mary Hosley expressed her concerns about amending the ordinance.

"I am also concerned that allowing people to serve on multiple boards decreases diversity and especially with the planning commission, I think we need to do a better job of making sure that the wards are equitably represented," Hosley said.

No action or decisions were made during Monday's meeting, but it will be brought back for more discussion at a future meeting.

Other items

Eddie Polk from Ward 1, Tom Capps from Ward 2, Flack from Ward 3 and reelected Mayor Annie Brown all took part in the official swearing-in ceremony during Monday's meeting.

The city council voted to update the poverty tax exemption, special assessments poverty tax exemption and the poverty guidelines for 2026.

Hosier said the updates are required by the state and is done on an annual basis.

The city council also approved the appointment of the board of review, a rate of compensation and the meeting schedule for the 2026 tax year.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

South Haven residents cautioned against email scam

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The City of South Haven recently became aware of a nationwide scam targeting residents by impersonating local planning and/or zoning departments.

According to a news release, scammers are scraping publicly available information to create realistic-looking demand or invoice letters requesting wire transfers.

These emails often come from addresses including planning.(cityname)@usa.com.

"The city was notified that a resident received one of these phishing emails which came from the email address planning.southhavenmi@usa.com," The release stated.

Although the fraudulent email looked legitimate, using the city's logo and the name of the city's planning and zoning administrator, this email account is not associated with the City of South Haven.

Residents and businesses can watch out for the following red flags:

- A request for a wire transfer. The City of South Haven does NOT request wire transfers. Payments may be paid in person at City Hall, mailed to City Hall, or paid through the BS&A portal.
- The itemized fees on the invoice do not match the city's fee schedule, which can be found on the city's website.
- The "from" email address is not a City of South Haven address. Our email addresses are from name@southhavenmi.gov.
- The logo listed on the invoice was distorted.
- A due date listed as "Due Upon Receipt". All legitimate invoices include a specific due date.

If unsure whether an invoice or request is legitimate, contact the City of South Haven at 269-637-0700.

The Tribune: Celebrating Our 127th Year

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OBITUARY

Linda Olsen

July 20, 1951 – Jan. 4, 2026

Linda Jane Olsen, age 74 of South Haven, Mich. passed away peacefully at her family cottage in Lake George, surrounded by her loved ones, on Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026.

Linda was born in Grand Ledge, Mich. to parents Wendell Edgar and Jean Alice (Hemmingway) Wilkins on July 20, 1951. She graduated from Grand Ledge High School with the class of 1969, then attended Ferris State University for a couple years where she made many friends and lasting memories. Linda was a very compassionate and community oriented person.

Her caring nature shone in the work she provided throughout the years, serving as director of We Care I.N.C., a Love Inc. affiliate, in South Haven. Her ministry to the community was very personal and heartfelt and extended to over 31 churches through We Care I.N.C., which stocked food pantries and provided various community resources. Linda also worked as a bus driver for South Haven Public Schools for over 14 years.

She met her husband, Richard "Rick" Samuel Olsen at the Portland Michigan Playhouse. Rick was acting on stage and she was working on the set. Their first date was at her niece Nicole's 4th Birthday party. Linda and Rick were later united in marriage on Aug. 15, 1981 at the First Congregational Church in Portland, Mich.

Linda loved spending time with her family, singing Anne Murray loudly together on road trips, playing cards and eating together; family and friends meant everything to Linda. She loved the time that she spent at the family's cottage on Lake George, the boat rides and the quieter days when she passed the hours painting and listening to music. Linda will be deeply missed.

She leaves behind her beloved husband, Rick Olsen of South Haven, daughter Meredith Olsen of Lake George, and son, Jonathan Olsen and his partner Kimberly of South Haven, niece, Nicole, and the "favorite child', her dog, Doc.

Linda was preceded in death by her parents, Wendell and Jean.

In accordance with her wishes cremation has taken place.

A celebration of life service will be held at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Jan. 17 at the First Congregational Church, UCC in South Haven with pastors David Frey, Jeffrey Dick and Eric Jarvis officiating.

Visitation will be held beginning an hour prior to the service at 10 a.m., as well as the evening before from 5 to 7 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 15.

Memorial Contributions in Linda's honor may be made to the following; First Congregational Church, UCC, 651 Phoenix St., South Haven, MI 49090, We Care Community Resources Center, 1301 M-43 Suite 2B, South Haven, MI 49090, or to Heartland Hospice, 1627 E. Broomfield St., Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858.

Linda's obituary can be viewed online and condolence to the family can be made at www.clarkfuneralchapel.com.

Gubernatorial candidate Mike Duggan, Michigan Democrats open year criticizing each other

By CRAIG MAUGER
The Detroit News (TNS)

Daniel Mears / The Detroit News / TNS

Former Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, a longtime Democrat who is now running for governor as an independent, says Michigan Democrats are "obsessed" with him. "For a guy he doesn't think can win, he sure spends a lot of time talking about me," Duggan said of Curtis Hertel Jr., chairman of the Michigan Democratic Party.

LANSING — Former Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, an independent who's running to be Michigan's next governor, accused the Michigan Democratic Party of being "obsessed" with him Monday, as the 2026 campaign year opened with a volley of competing press conferences.

Duggan, a former Democrat who broke from the party in December 2024 to launch his independent bid for the state's top office, held a session at noon with reporters. Before that, at 11 a.m., Michigan Democrats put on their own event, criticizing Duggan for not being more outspoken in opposition to Republican President Donald Trump.

Curtis Hertel, chairman of the Michigan Democratic Party, labeled Duggan's campaign for governor "an expensive and self-serving ego trip on a road to nowhere."

"Duggan has been consistently in last place, with no path of winning a general election," Hertel told reporters.

Duggan countered by saying Hertel was attempting to cover "the fact that Democrats don't stand for anything, except they're against the Republicans."

"You saw right out of the gate how obsessed the Democrats are with me," Duggan said.

At another point Monday – 302 days before the Nov. 3 general election – Duggan added of Hertel, "For a guy he doesn't think can win, he sure spends a lot of time talking about me."

The back-and-forth pointed to the high stakes and unusual nature of Michigan's 2026 race for governor, in which both Democrats and Republicans are trying to figure out how to handle Duggan's independent campaign.

The two major political parties have long dominated state government. The person holding the governor's office in Michigan has been a Republican or a Democrat for more than a century, according to the Secretary of State's office.

Michigan's current governor, Democrat Gretchen Whitmer, can't run again this year because of term limits.

Some Democrats fear that Duggan's candidacy could shift enough voters away from the party to give Republicans a victory in November.

The press conferences on Monday showed Michigan Democrats view Duggan as a threat, said David Dulio, a political science professor at Oakland University. The risk in going after him aggressively is that the party could alienate Duggan's supporters in both the governor's contest and in races down ballot, Dulio said.

"It might irritate them so much that they sit out the Senate race," Dulio said.

National Democrats frequently attacked independent candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. in the 2024 presidential election. Kennedy eventually dropped out and endorsed Trump, the Republican nominee who ultimately won.

However, Dulio said Hertel might have made a valid point by questioning the impact of spending by pro-Duggan groups so far in the campaign.

Hertel told reporters Monday that Put Progress First, a nonprofit that's backing Duggan, has already spent somewhere around $8 million on media and billboards around the state while Duggan continues to poll in third place behind the Democratic and Republican candidates.

"I think this campaign has shown that it has zero movement and zero real grassroots support throughout the state," Hertel said of Duggan. "I think it's going to be a problem when it comes to getting on the ballot, and I think it's going to be a problem when there isn't anyone to actually do the work of knocking doors and talking to voters."

There are expected to be primary races on the both the Democratic and Republican sides to pick their nominees for governor.

As for the strategy of attacking Duggan, Hertel said his party had a responsibility to tell people that Duggan and others, like Trump, "have no interest" in policies that help working people.

State Reps. Joey Andrews, D-St. Joseph, and Carrie Rheingans, D-Ann Arbor, also spoke at the Michigan Democratic Party event. Andrews labeled the three-term former mayor a "shapeshifter."

"Duggan is whoever he needs to be for whatever room he's in," Andrews said. "You know, he's going to tell people in the trades, when he's with them, that he's going to get them good jobs, and then, he's going to go to the business groups and tell them he's going to get them cheap labor."

But Duggan said Democrats had become "a party that has basically one mantra: Vote blue no matter who." He added that Democrats couldn't come up with a statewide affordable housing plan or a proposal to improve K-12 schools when they had majorities in both the House and Senate in 2023 and 2024.

As for Trump, Duggan noted that he has criticized Trump's tariffs against Canada.

"The other stuff that these guys get into, the Republicans and Democrats, with their outrage machines on whatever the latest thing that Trump said, I'm not going to get into that," Duggan said. "I am going to deal with solving problems."

Duggan defended his path in the election, saying there's "enormous sentiment" in favor of a third option and he's going to "be campaigning day and night in every corner of the state."

"I have never seen a state more evenly divided than Michigan today, and people more fed up," Duggan maintained. "And so, I don't think the climate's ever been more fertile."

Gilchrist weighs dropping bid for Michigan governor to run for secretary of state

By CRAIG MAUGER
The Detroit News (TNS)

LANSING — Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II is considering ending his campaign to be Michigan's next governor and instead joining the race for secretary of state in the coming days, according to three sources with knowledge of internal discussions that have been playing out among top state Democrats.

The sources spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly address the deliberations.

A spokesman for Gilchrist's campaign didn't respond Wednesday to a request for comment.

Gilchrist's potential exit from the gubernatorial primary would be a boon to Democratic Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, who's been viewed by many as the favorite to win the party's nomination in August. The only other Democrat in the race is Genesee County Sheriff Chris Swanson.

Democrats face a complicated path to try to keep the governor's office in the November general election. Former Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, who used to be a Democrat, is running for governor as an independent, and Michigan voters have traditionally elected the other party after one party held the office for two terms.

Michigan's current governor, Democrat Gretchen Whitmer, can't run again this year because of voter-imposed term limits.

Gilchrist, 43, of Detroit, was Whitmer's running mate in 2018 and 2022. The former software engineer and ex-candidate for Detroit clerk launched his own bid for governor in March, saying Michigan needed a " problem solver."

However, Gilchrist has struggled to raise money and appeared to struggle to cut into Benson's support among Democratic primary voters.

As of Oct. 20, Benson's campaign had $2.98 million available to spend, while Gilchrist's campaign had $378,000 available to spend.

The Democratic secretary of state nominee will be selected by party members at a convention on April 19. Some Democrats view Gilchrist as a potential strong contender if he joins the race because of his reputation within the party, his progressive stances and his ties to Whitmer.

The Democratic secretary of state field already features Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum, Deputy Secretary of State Aghogho Edevbie and former state Sen. Adam Hollier and Suzanna Shkreli, the state's former lottery commissioner.

DEBOER

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There's some plan to bring back a citizens police academy. We used to run it every other year, every third year, just to showcase more of what we do, more of what my guys do and it's a great way for people to meet our officers, because each segment of that academy is taught by an officer who specializes in that field. So, we'll have a class that's all about crime scene evidence technician stuff, or, how do we process a crime scene? What does it look like? How do you lift a fingerprint? What's a shoe print cast look like, that kind of stuff. So, our crime scene techs would then teach that class. Traffic stop stuff would be taught by guys who like to do traffic. It's just a great way for people to understand more of how we do things and why we do things the way we do it, but also it gives us a chance to showcase the great employees I have.

The community engagement is a huge part for me. We did pretty good last summer with the Family Fun Fest, the National Night Out. We spend a lot of time this Christmas doing some really cool things with North Shore Elementary School. They run a big Santa shop. We spent five hours for three days wrapping presents with the kids as they come in from the Santa workshop that's all put on by the first responders Children's Fund.

We ran Shop with a Cop. We started with like, six or seven kids and we do 15 kids. Now, I can't have my whole staff come in to do it, so we invited SHAES for the last two years to come and help us, just because shopping with three kids is a lot and they've been great. Then we have a family from Kalamazoo – they don't want to be named – they've been coming for 27 years to adopt families. Every year they'll reach out to us, we'll send them names of families that we know that we've dealt with throughout the year or that have been recommended by the school or apartment complexes, families that are in need at Christmas time.

What is your favorite part of working in law enforcement?

I should say my favorite spot was the night sergeant spot, I love that. I loved the interview and interrogation. That was my favorite part, talking to people about stuff that they shouldn't tell anybody in the world, and getting them to talk is always, that was the rush. I loved it and the best part about it is you just talk to people. It's not bad cop, good cop all the time. It's not crossing that line of being a jerk or taking someone's Fourth Amendment right away. It's just being the type of person that a person trusts that they'll tell you something. It's that development, that relationship development part of interview and interrogation that I liked.

Now, I like that I'm working for my guys. They might not know what I'm working on and I might be working on something that we won't see the fruit of for another six or eight months, but when it comes out and my guys really appreciate it, that's what I like.

I don't get to talk to bad guys all the time now, I actually get to talk to good people and I can develop relationships with people who are members of this community, who are outstanding members of this community, who are influential members of this community, and I get to be part of that community.

Do you have any hidden talents, special skills or fun hobbies that you enjoy?

Not really. I'm a family guy; I've got two older kids. Hobbies – I like to golf, I like to boat, I like music, any kind of music, except for maybe classical music. I'm a swimmer. I'm pretty good in the water. (I) played water polo for a little bit, but I don't know that I have anything hidden. (I'm) kind of a sports junkie. Love to travel. My wife and I are kind of foodies, so we like to go to bigger cities and try really nice food.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

LMC awards Schinck the Spirit of Nursing

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SCHINCK

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Cameron Schinck has earned Lake Michigan College's highest student honor for nursing graduates.

The Coloma resident was given the Spirit of Nursing Award, recognizing him as the fall 2025 graduate who best exemplifies the program's philosophy of excellence, integrity, and compassionate care.

With his sights set on a nursing career, Schinck transferred to LMC in the spring of 2023 after a semester at Adrian College.

"Health care and the human body fascinate me," Schinck said in a news release. "Our bodies work in such amazing ways, so I wanted to learn about it and use that knowledge to help others. The reward I feel after making a positive impact on somebody's life is one of the most important things to me."

Schinck was nominated for the Spirit of Nursing Award by classmates and chosen by the faculty from among the nominees.

A fellow nursing student stated: "Cameron takes his education and the safety of patients seriously. He holds himself to high standards and will make an extraordinary nurse."

LMC Nursing Program Director and Faculty Denise Gardner echoed the sentiment of Schinck's classmates.

"Cameron has been 'all in' since his first day of the nursing program, and he continues to thrive in both the classroom and clinical settings," Gardner said. "He will be an excellent registered nurse and a true asset to this community."

Schinck credits support from his mom, dad, brother, girlfriend, and the rest of his family and friends for keeping him motivated during his education. He specifically credited his mom, who is also a nurse, for being an inspiration during the process.

"My mom was in nursing school at LMC when I was 5 or 6 (years old), so I saw all the work she put into getting her education," Schinck said. "When I doubted myself while I was going through classes and clinicals, she understood how I felt and encouraged me to keep going and just continue to do the best I could."

Immediately after graduation this month, Schinck will work at Corewell Health Lakeland Hospital's orthopedic and neurological unit in St. Joseph. He plans to concurrently pursue his master's degree in nursing with the goal of becoming a nurse practitioner.

Schinck said the LMC nursing program is run with the highest level of dignity and professionalism for giving him a solid foundation to begin his health care career.

"I absolutely feel ready to start my nursing career. The LMC nursing faculty did an excellent job preparing me for this. The program is tough, but fair. It's one of the best nursing educations that you'll get in the state of Michigan," Schinck said in the release.

LMC first awarded the Spirit of Nursing Award in 1991. Its recipients are nominated by their classmates and chosen by the LMC Nursing faculty.

Criteria upon which the award is based include:

- Demonstration of a caring attitude toward patients and peers.
- Strong communication skills and the ability to collaborate with others in the academic and health care setting.
- Attitude of inclusivity, civility and exhibits respect for diversity.
- Acts with integrity and a strong sense of ethics.
- Commitment to excellence.
- Identified as a leader and role model.

Photo provided

Edye and Mike Hyde will perform their jazz and pop concert in South Haven on Jan. 18.

Jazz duo to perform at First Congregational UCC

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The jazz duo Edye Evans Hyde and Mike Hyde are coming to South Haven.

According to a news release, the concert will take place at 3 p.m. on Jan. 18 at First Congregational UCC.

Influenced by the vocal and guitar duos of Tuck and Patti and Ella Fitzgerald and Joe Pass, their music covers jazz and pop artists from Billie Holiday to Bill Withers.

"Mike's unique approach to accompaniment, employing simple looping and a special tuning of his guitars, creates the perfect support for Edye's silky rich vocals," the release stated.

Known for her scat singing and jazz interpretations, Edye is also a theatrical performer and founder of Ebony Road Players in Grand Rapids.

From Italy to China, Edye and Mike have taken their music all over the world. They have also helped shape the talents of young musicians through their work as educators.

"Being an artist is the best way we bring people together," Edye Hyde said in the release. "It provides a bit of time for us all to have a shared experience."

Tickets are $20 at the door, free for children 12 and under.

For more information, call Diane and Lisa at 269-637-3804 (opt. 5).

For more information about Edye and Mike's music, go to www.edyeandmike.com.

Michigan Works hosts math workshops for adult learners

By TRIBUNE STAFF

PAW PAW — Michigan Works of Berrien, Cass, Van Buren will be hosting math workshops to help adult learners strengthen basic math skills, tackle tricky topics, or get ahead in class.

According to a news release, the Michigan Works Adult Education team will host the workshops from 10 to 11:30 a.m. on Tuesdays and Fridays for the month of January.

"The workshops offer clear explanations, hands-on practice and helpful tips for adult learners," the release stated.

Walk-ins are welcome. Workshops are open to students who are currently enrolled in or interested in enrolling in the Michigan Works GED program.

"We know that education is the often the first step to employment, but we also know that it can be intimidating to get started," Michigan Works Adult Education Manager Mandi Somers said in the release. "Although our math workshops are taking place in January, we help individuals earn their education all year round. Our Adult Education team can help you build your own individualized plan to work at your own pace in our learning labs. We also have resources to help you work on your GED preparation from home."

The Michigan Works Adult Education team has general office hours at the Benton Harbor Michigan Works Service Center, the Paw Paw Michigan Works Service Center and at the Galien Public Library.

"Individuals who would like to get started in the adult education program are encouraged to stop in and meet with the Michigan Works team," the release stated.

For more information on hours, locations or general questions, go to miworks.org/find-education.

Michigan Works of Berrien, Cass, Van Buren specializes in educating, training and employing individuals of all ages.

"We work with local businesses to find out what keeps them up at night and help them tackle the most pressing challenges they may face, including attracting and retaining talent," the release stated.

For more information, go to www.miworks.org.

New law means states have big decisions on Medicaid, SNAP, taxes

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and DAVID A. LIEB
Associated Press

States have major decisions to make in 2026 about the social safety net and taxes in the aftermath of a sweeping law President Donald Trump signed last year.

The federal government is shifting more responsibilities to states over the next few years, and states must prepare for greater costs in the Medicaid health care and SNAP food aid programs. They also must decide whether to offset upcoming federal funding cuts with state tax dollars. And they must weigh whether to cut state taxes on tips, overtime wages and other items to remain in line with Trump's big bill.

Though most states still have ample rainy day funds, the extra burdens are coming as many states face their tightest budgets since the early days of the coronavirus pandemic.

"There's a big storm coming for state budgets – the radar is clear – and it's going to hit almost every state," said Tim Storey, CEO of the National Conference of State Legislatures. "It's going to mean some hard choices."

In most states, those determinations will begin in January, when legislatures convene and governors lay out their agendas.

Food aid will become a bigger expense for states

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which is used by 42 million Americans to help buy groceries, is going to become more expensive for states to run and harder for some people to qualify for assistance.

Currently, the federal government picks up the full cost of benefits – around $94 billion in the fiscal year that ended in September 2024 – and splits the administrative costs with the states, which run the program. The federal share of administrative costs for 2024 was about $6 billion.

Starting Oct. 1, states will have to pay three-fourths of the cost to run the program. And starting in late 2027, some states that make errors in more than 6 percent of payments – often for paying a household more than it's supposed to get after its income rises – will have to start paying some of the costs of benefits.

California already has allocated $84 million to try to reduce SNAP errors, plus additional money to help counties implement other new requirements.

The shift in administrative costs could come to around $50 million a year in Florida, said Sky Beard, the Florida director for No Kid Hungry. Paying for some SNAP benefits, if the state is forced to, could be in the neighborhood of $1 billion a year. She said that's a reason lawmakers have a lot of questions about the details of error rates.

Other states are weighing whether to put more money into SNAP.

New Jersey Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, a Democrat, said the state has an obligation to help people access health care and food. But he said the magnitude of federal cuts – as much as a $36 billion reduction for New Jersey over the next decade for Medicaid alone, according to KFF, an organization that researches health policy – could make it hard to keep all the state's social programs unchanged.

"What there will be is a commitment to doing our level best to make sure that all of the people's needs get covered," Coughlin said.

States could consider scaling back Medicaid

The federal law signed by Trump imposes work requirements for some adults on Medicaid, the joint federal-state health insurance program for low-income people. Most states must start those work mandates by January 2027, which means they must be accounted for in their next state budgets.

But states can start sooner if they desire.

Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen announced that his state will launch Medicaid work requirements in May. The Republican said the state could handle the change without hiring more government employees and that the work mandate "can have a gigantic impact in helping lift people up."

But many states face tens of millions of dollars of costs merely to prepare for the new Medicaid requirements.

The Missouri Department of Social Services has requested about $33 million in the next budget for technology improvements needed to comply with Medicaid work checks and more frequent eligibility reviews. It's seeking more than $12 million to hire the equivalent of about 120 people to carry out the tasks.

The work requirement applies to people with slightly higher incomes who are eligible for Medicaid under a voluntary expansion included in President Barack Obama's 2010 health insurance overhaul. Forty states and the District of Columbia took up the offer. The states that didn't agree to the expansion all have legislatures controlled by Republicans.

Evan Vucci / AP

President Donald Trump listens as Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz speaks during an executive order signing in the Oval Office of the White House on Dec. 18 in Washington.

The work requirement is the biggest piece in a series of Medicaid changes that the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office forecasts will reduce Medicaid spending by $911 billion through 2034 and leave 10 million more Americans uninsured over that time frame.

States could respond by narrowing who is eligible for Medicaid, as the District of Columbia did in a policy that kicked in Jan 1. Or they could follow Colorado and Idaho and cut Medicaid reimbursements to medical providers.

Liz Williams, who analyzes Medicaid at KFF, said home care, dental benefits and coverage of GLP-1 drugs often used for weight loss, also could face restrictions in some states.

Some changes are expected to hit rural hospitals especially hard. The federal law seeks to partly offset that by spending $50 billion over the next five years. States will have to decide how to use their share of that money.

States also face decisions on tax cuts

The federal law temporarily halts federal income taxes on tips and overtime pay, provides new tax deductions for seniors and some people with auto loans, and enacts numerous new corporate tax breaks.

States can decide whether to incorporate those tax cuts into their own income tax codes.

Some states have income tax laws that automatically conform with changes to federal tax laws. But officials in other states have to decide whether to link up – and whether to do so partially or fully.

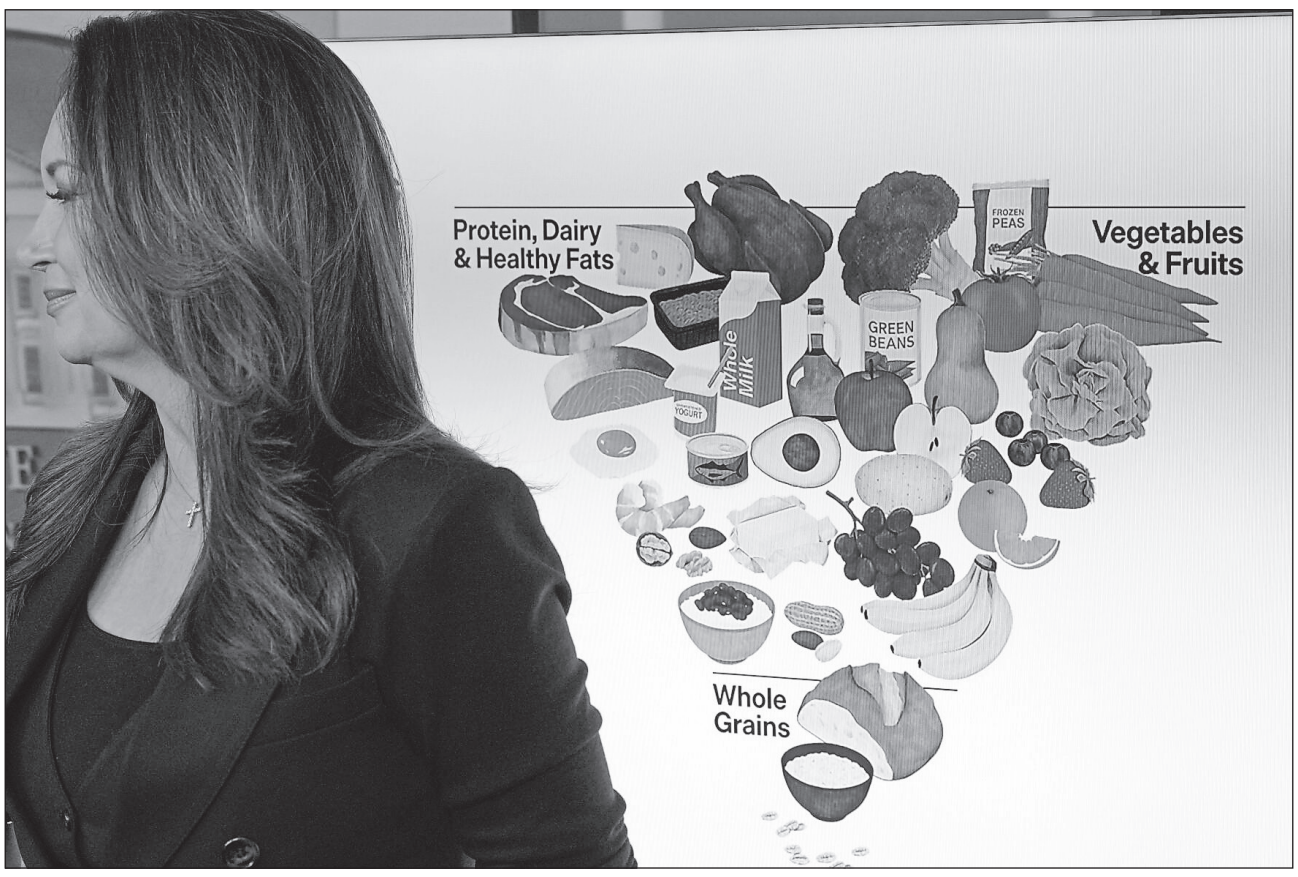
Michigan is the only state so far to vote to opt in to the tax breaks on tips and overtime. Those provisions automatically carry over to state income taxes in about a half-dozen other states.

Officials in Arizona are among those planning to conform to the federal tax cuts when their legislative session begins in January. Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs said embracing the tax breaks can help "ease the cost of living crisis" and provide certainty to taxpayers. Republican legislative leaders say they stand ready to give their approval.

New dietary guidelines released

Americans urged to avoid processed foods, added sugar

By JONEL ALECCIA
Associated Press



Jacquelyn Martin / AP

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins stands by an image of a food pyramid during a briefing at the White House, on Wednesday in Washington.

Americans should eat more whole foods and protein, fewer highly processed foods and less added sugar, according to the latest edition of federal nutrition advice released Wednesday by the Trump administration.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins issued the 2025-2030 U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which offer updated recommendations for a healthy diet and provide the foundation for federal nutrition programs and policies. They come as Kennedy has for months stressed overhauling the U.S. food supply as part of his Make America Healthy Again agenda.

"My message is clear: Eat real food," Kennedy said at a White House briefing.

The guidelines emphasize consumption of fresh vegetables, whole grains and dairy products, long advised as part of a healthy eating plan. Officials released a new graphic depicting an inverted version of the long-abandoned food pyramid, with protein, dairy, healthy fats and fruits and vegetables at the top and whole grains at the bottom.

But they also take a new stance on "highly processed" foods, and refined carbohydrates, urging consumers to avoid "packaged, prepared, ready-to-eat or other foods that are salty or sweet, such as chips, cookies and candy." That's a different term for ultraprocessed foods, the tasty, energy-dense products that make up more than half the calories in the U.S. diet and have been linked to chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity.

The new guidance backs away from revoking long-standing advice to limit saturated fats, despite signals from Kennedy and Food and Drug Commissioner Marty Makary that the administration would push for more consumption of animal fats to end the "war" on saturated fats.

Instead, the document suggests that Americans should choose whole-food sources of saturated fat – such as meat, whole-fat dairy or avocados – while continuing to limit saturated fat consumption to no more than 10 percent of daily calories. The guidance says "other options can include butter or beef tallow," despite previous recommendations to avoid those fats.

Guidelines were due for an update

The dietary guidelines, required by law to be updated every five years, provide a template for a healthy diet. But in a country where more than half of adults have a diet-related chronic disease, few Americans actually follow the guidance, research shows.

The new recommendations drew praise from some prominent nutrition and medical experts.

"There should be broad agreement that eating more whole foods and reducing highly processed carbohydrates is a major advance in how we approach diet and health," said Dr. David Kessler, a former FDA commissioner who has written books about diet and nutrition and has sent a petition to the FDA to remove key ingredients in ultraprocessed foods.

"The guidelines affirm that food is medicine and offer clear direction patients and physicians can use to improve health," said Dr. Bobby Mukkamala, president of the American Medical Association.

Other experts were relieved that the guidelines didn't go against decades of nutrition evidence linking saturated fat to heart disease, but they were critical of the guidelines' focus on meat and dairy as a primary source of protein instead of plant-based sources.

"Overall, if people eat the way these are recommended, they will be eating more calories, not less," said Marion Nestle, a nutritionist and food policy expert who advised previous editions of the guidance.

The new document is just 10 pages, upholding Kennedy's pledge to create a simple, understandable guideline. Previous editions of the dietary guidelines have grown over the years, from a 19-page pamphlet in 1980 to the 164-page document issued in 2020, which included a four-page executive summary.

The guidance will have the most profound effect on the federally funded National School Lunch Program, which is required to follow the guidelines to feed nearly 30 million U.S. children on a typical school day.

The Agriculture Department will have to translate the recommendations into specific requirements for school meals, a process that can take years, said Diane Pratt-Heavner, spokesperson for the School Nutrition Association. The latest school nutrition standards were proposed in 2023 but won't be fully implemented until 2027, she noted.

Science advisers didn't make ultraprocessed food recommendations

The new guidelines largely rejected the advice of a 20-member panel of nutrition experts convened by the Biden administration, who met for nearly two years to review the latest scientific evidence on diet and health. Kennedy had criticized the expertise of the panel members and suggested that they had ties to the food industry that influenced their advice.

Instead, the new guidance relied on a new set of experts revealed Wednesday in supporting documents. Of the 10 experts who led the new scientific review under Kennedy, five reported financial ties to beef, pork or dairy industries or to makers of infant formula or supplements.

The new group rejected more than half the recommendations of the previous panel, the documents showed.

That previous panel didn't make recommendations about ultraprocessed food. Although a host of studies have shown links between ultraprocessed foods and poor health outcomes, the nutrition experts had concerns with the quality of the research and the certainty that those foods, and not other factors, were causing the problems.

The recommendations on highly processed foods drew cautiously positive reactions. The FDA and the Agriculture Department are already working on a definition of ultraprocessed foods, but it's expected to take time.

Not all highly processed foods are unhealthy, said Dr. David Ludwig, an endocrinologist and researcher at Boston Children's Hospital.

"I think the focus should be on highly processed carbohydrates," he said, noting that processing of protein or fats can be benign or even helpful.

More protein recommended

The guidelines made a few other notable changes, including a call to potentially double protein consumption.

The previous recommended dietary allowance called for 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight – about 54 grams daily for a 150-pound person. The new recommendation is 1.2 to 1.6 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight. An average American man consumes about 100 grams of protein per day, or about twice the previously recommended limit.

Makary said the new advice supersedes protein guidance that was based on the "bare minimum" required for health.

Ludwig also noted that the earlier recommendation was the minimum amount needed to prevent protein deficiency and said higher amounts of protein might be beneficial.

"A moderate increase in protein to help displace the processed carbohydrates makes sense," he said.

Officials with the American Heart Association, however, called for more research on protein consumption and the best sources for optimal health.

"Pending that research, we encourage consumers to prioritize plant-based proteins, seafood and lean meats and to limit high-fat animal products including red meat, butter, lard and tallow, which are linked to increased cardiovascular risk," the group said in a statement.

Avoid added sugars

The guidelines advise avoiding or sharply limiting added sugars or non-nutritive sweeteners, saying "no amount" is considered part of a healthy diet.

No one meal should contain more than 10 grams of added sugars, or about 2 teaspoons, the new guidelines say.

Previous federal guidelines recommended limiting added sugars to less than 10 percent of daily calories for people older than 2, but to aim for less. That's about 12 teaspoons a day in a 2,000-calorie daily diet. Children younger than 2 should have no added sugars at all, the older guidance said.

In general, most Americans consume about 17 teaspoons of added sugars per day, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Alcohol limits removed

The new guidelines roll back previous recommendations to limit alcohol to one drink or less per day for women and two drinks or less per day for men.

Instead, the guidance advises Americans to "consume less alcohol for better health." They also say that alcohol should be avoided by pregnant women, people recovering from alcohol use disorder and those who are unable to control the amount they drink.

South Haven Tribune CLASSIFIEDS

Classified Desk: 1-855-317-4292

Hours: Monday - Friday 9am-2pm EST

0100 ANNOUNCEMENTS

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0200 EMPLOYMENT

The City of South Haven is seeking qualified candidates for the **Beach Safety Manager/ Chief Lifeguard**. Responsible for the oversight and coordination of all open water lifeguard and beach enforcement operations within the City of South Haven. The incumbent is expected to possess advanced knowledge of lifesaving practices in open water environments, emergency response operations, personnel management, public education, and administrative leadership.

Bachelor's degree in Public Administration, Recreation, Emergency Services, or related field preferred. Five years of experience in Public Safety Operations (open water lifeguard operations preferred), including at least one year of supervisory or management experience. Current EMT- Basic certification preferred. Valid State of Michigan Driver's License. Must pass the USLA open water swim test.

Candidates may apply online at www.southhavenmi.gov/human_resources or by mailing a resume and cover letter to City of South Haven, Attn HR, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090.

The City of South Haven is an Equal Opportunity Employer who places a high value on diversity, equity and inclusion.

0900 LEGALS

CASCO TOWNSHIP ORDINANCE OUTDOOR GATHERING AMENDMENT ORDINANCE

An Ordinance to amend the Outdoor Gathering Ordinance regarding the definition of "outdoor gathering," and regarding special events venues and the number of licenses issued.

THE TOWNSHIP OF CASCO, COUNTY OF ALLEGAN, STATE OF MICHIGAN, ORDAINS:

Section 1. Amendment. Section 2.3.d and Section 2.3.e and Section 2.3.f of the Outdoor Gathering Ordinance shall be added to Section 2.3 (the rest of Section 2.3 shall remain unchanged) to state as follows.
d. A non-commercial event (i.e. for which no direct or non-direct payment is made for admission) held on private property; or
e. An event held as part of a special use approved according to the Casco Township Zoning Ordinance, as amended, if the option of the event was presented to the Township in the special use application process; or
f. An event held as part of a use allowed by right according to the Casco Township Zoning Ordinance, as amended, if the event is normally recognized as an expected part of the use allowed by right (e.g. spectators watching an athletic event at a school).

Section 2. Amendment. Section 6 of the Outdoor Gathering Ordinance shall be amended by the addition of Section 6.3 (Section 6.1 and Section 6.2 shall remain unchanged); Section 6.3 shall state in its entirety as follows.
3. A license shall not be issued by the Township Board more than four times per calendar year for the same or substantially the same real property identified per Section 4.3 above, unless the Township has issued a special use permit for the real property, allowing a special events venue to be located on that real property

Section 3. Effective Date. This Ordinance was approved and adopted by the Township Board of Casco Township, Allegan County, Michigan, at a regular meeting held on December 15, 2025, and it is ordered to take effect 30 days after publication in the South Haven Tribune, a newspaper with general circulation in the Township.

Allan Overhiser
Township Supervisor
Rachel Ridley
Township Clerk

STATE OF MICHIGAN VAN BUREN COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS Trust

In the matter of the Robert B. Engle Trust dated April 16, 2002. Robert Bruce Engle Jr. was the grantor of the Trust and his date of birth was June 28, 1928.

TO ALL CREDITORS:

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, Robert Bruce Engle Jr., died December 18, 2025. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the trust will be forever barred unless presented to Todd L. Engle, trustee, within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Attorney Name:
P. Haans Mulder, P61842
321 Settlers Road
Holland, MI 49423
616-392-1821

Date: January 5, 2026

Trustee Name:
Todd L. Engle
6544 146th Avenue
Holland, MI 49423
616-335-6161

RINGING IN THE NEW YEAR

Photos by Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

Hundreds of people gathered downtown South Haven to ring in the new year with the annual New Years Eve party and beach ball drop.

The Motley Misfits amazed the crowd of party goers with their fire twirling performance during the annual New Years Eve Party in South Haven.

Water service line verifications to continue in SH

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Water service line replacements and verifications will continue this winter with crews from the City of South Haven and Five Star Energy Services verifying service line materials and replacing any lead or galvanized line segments as required.

According to a news release, replacement work this winter will be scheduled only in limited areas to help minimize road restoration during winter conditions; however, limited work may still occur outside of the designated areas.

"Customer participation is essential to completing this effort," the release stated. "Hundreds of customers have already had services replaced and many others have been inspected and confirmed to have non-lead materials."

All permanent restoration will take place in the spring.

Five Star Energy Services is the contractor hired to complete the majority of the work. Representatives from Five Star may contact customers directly to coordinate in-home verifications and/or replacement appointments.

Customers may also contact the city directly with questions or to schedule appointments.

What to expect:

■ If the in-home material is unknown, city staff or Five Star will schedule an appointment to inspect the service line where it enters the building.

■ For outside verifications, crews may dig small holes near the meter pit or curb valve. No appointment is required for outside-only verifications.

■ If any portion of the service line is lead (or galvanized pipe that was previously connected to lead), a replacement will be required. There is no cost to customers for verification or replacement.

■ Customers who do not respond to multiple outreach attempts may receive formal written notices later this winter. If access cannot be scheduled by early spring, water service may be shut off for non-compliance. Written notice will be sent to the billing address prior to any shut off.

Water service investigations and replacements are mandated by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency.

This project is supported by a State of Michigan low-interest revolving fund loan and $5.8 million in grant funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

To schedule an appointment or ask questions, contact the South Haven Department of Public Works at 269-637-0732 and ask for Dustin Guminski, or email dguminski@southhavenmi.gov.

For more information and a map of the designated areas, go to www.SHAWSA.org.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

Bob Eder joins Friends of Blue Star Trail board

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SAUGATUCK — Friends of the Blue Star Trail recently announced the addition of Saugatuck Township resident, Bob Eder to the board of directors.

According to a news release, Eder decided to join the board to help improve the Blue Star Trail.

In 2020, Eder and his wife Janet relocated from Chicago moving into their vacation home they have owned since 2008.

Prior to retirement, he spent the first half of his career in corporate employee benefits and treasury, the latter half as chief financial officer of several nonprofit organizations.

Eder has served for over 40 years on a variety of nonprofit boards, finance, audit and investment committees; and as an elected member of his local school board in Evanston, Ill.

"We are very excited to have Bob join our Board," President of Friends of the Blue Star Trail Clark Carmichael said in the release. "He brings tremendous expertise, energy and enthusiasm to our initiative and has volunteered to act as interim secretary for the Board."

"I'm thrilled to join such a strong local organization which enjoys broad-based community support for building the Blue Star Trail," Eder said in the release, "My love of bicycling dates back to my boyhood in Oak Park, Ill. My interest was reignited in 2003 when I changed jobs to a position in the Chicago Loop providing me the opportunity to bike to work on the lakefront trail. The 18-mile-long trail is a testament to the value of a 'linear park' for so many people engaged in so many activities."

Members of the board include Carmichael as president, Jack Eisinger as treasurer, Eder as interim secretary, Kevin Martin and Nancy Kimble.

"The board anticipates sharing several very positive progress updates on the Blue Star Trail in the near future," the release stated.

Friends of the Blue Star Trail is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to promote and fund construction of the Blue Star Trail – a 20-mile paved recreational trail connecting people and communities between South Haven and Saugatuck – in partnership with local communities.

Friends of the Blue Star Trail raises money for engineering, local match funding required for state and federal matching construction grants and ongoing maintenance. The municipalities along the route apply for state and federal matching grants and will own the sections of the Blue Star Trail within their borders.

Photo provided

Saugatuck Township resident Bob Eder recently joined the Friends of the Blue Star Trail board of directors.

Gordie Howe Bridge to give Detroit walkable, bikeable link to Canada

By JANELLE D. JAMES
Bridge Detroit

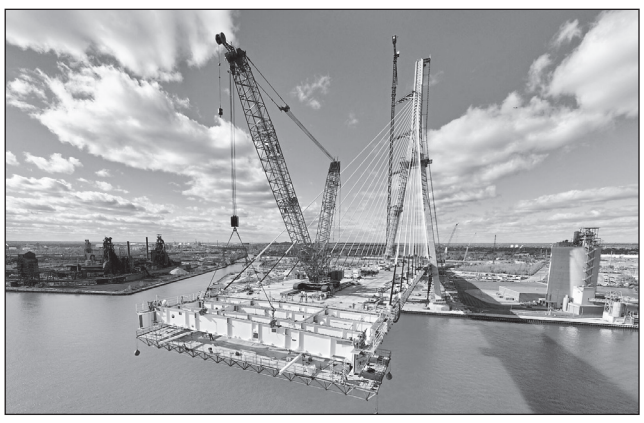
Detroit's Gordie Howe International Bridge is set to change the way people cross the Detroit River. For the first time in decades, residents will be able to walk or bike, in addition to driving, into Canada.

Expected to open in early 2026, the bridge is designed to ease congestion at existing crossings. Once it is built, it will become the only bridge from Michigan to Canada that allows for foot and bike traffic, joining just a few other US-Canadian crossings with pedestrian lanes.

"People didn't want us to lose a unique opportunity to design a new international crossing without considering the incorporation of a multi-use path for pedestrians and cyclists," said Heather Grondin, chief relations officer for the Gordie Howe International Bridge.

Construction began in 2018 and as of Nov. 13, it is 98 percent completed. Though an official opening date hasn't been announced, officials expect the bridge will open early 2026.

The Gordie Howe International Bridge will have six lanes, three in each direction,



David Guralnick / Detroit News

A support beam is lowered into place as construction continues on the Gordie Howe International Bridge Nov. 1, 2023, in Detroit.

for vehicular traffic. The added bridge is expected to alleviate slowdowns on the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel and the Ambassador Bridge, which has four lanes for traffic.

"This bridge, along with the adjacent infrastructure, will connect directly from Interstate 75 to the Ontario highway system, known as Highway 401, without trucks or cars having to stop at traffic lights along the way," Grondin said.

In the case of backups, Grondin noted that cars will be contained within the port of entry to avoid traffic congestion on I-75 and trucks will also be required to turn their engine off during inspection to reduce noise and air pollution.

"We've done a lot of work to ensure that … people will have a destination when they go across the multiuse path and will be able to connect to much broader trail networks," she said.

Creating another port of entry to and from our northern neighbor has been in the works for over 20 years.

Several studies were conducted in the early 2000s to look more closely at cross-border travel patterns amid concerns that infrastructure at the time would not support an anticipated rise in traffic. In 2012, then-Gov. Rick Snyder and Canada's prime minister announced an agreement on a publicly owned Windsor-Detroit bridge crossing.

"The Ambassador Bridge is basically privately owned and controlled by one family, and I think there was nervousness around that," said Jeff Rightmer, professor of supply chain management at Wayne State University. "The new bridge alleviates some of that monopoly that the Moroun family had."

The roughly $4.4 billion project was funded by the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority, the governing body that oversees the business affairs of the Gordie Howe International Bridge, and financed in Canadian dollars, according to the Federal Highway Administration.

Since the Canadian government paid for the bridge, it will recoup the toll revenue and receive ongoing capital and availability payments to operate, maintain and rehabilitate the project for the next 36 years.

"I think it made it much more attractive to the U.S., specifically Michigan, (for Canada) to take on a lot of that debt," Rightmer said. "You can tell that Canada really wanted to get it done."

A new way across

The additional bridge will provide drivers with more options on the road.

"The ability to have more than the Ambassador Bridge, the tunnel and the Blue Water Bridge up in Port Huron is just huge for the region," Rightmer said. "The ability to move more stuff back and forth is only going to benefit Michigan and Canada."

The Gordie Howe Bridge will be particularly attractive to tourists as it will have bike and pedestrian lanes. Only the Peace Bridge and Rainbow Bridge over the Niagara River, and Thousand Islands Bridge over the St. Lawrence River allow foot traffic.

The Ambassador Bridge originally had an eight-foot-wide sidewalk for pedestrians. But it was closed after the 9/11 attacks amid security concerns.

"With all of the parks and the riverfront redevelopment … it gives the average Detroiter a lot more access to Canada and makes it a lot easier to get there," he said.

Pedestrians and cyclists will enter through a separate port but are still required to show proper identification, either a passport or an enhanced license.

You can walk, but run won't move

Even with a new bridge rising over the river, Detroit's oldest international marathon plans to stay its course.

Participants in the Detroit Free Press International Marathon cross the Ambassador Bridge to Canada and return through the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel.

Despite the Gordie Howe Bridge being wider and a bit shorter, Aaron Velthoven, the race's executive producer, said there are no plans to change the course of the race in the near future.

"The bridge is much further away from where we traditionally start and finish," he said. "To even entertain something like that, we would have to dramatically change where we start and finish."

Both bridges are roughly 150 feet above the Detroit River at its highest point.

"The Ambassador Bridge is … a steep incline but the nice thing is, from our race perspective, the bridge is early in the course."

SOUTH HAVEN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays through May 26, 2026.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: "The Story of Snow" by Mark Cassino and John Nelson Ph.D. Storywalk. The museum is now closed but appointments can be scheduled by calling the museum.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at Lakeside Social, 9921 Blue Star Memorial Highway, South Haven.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring at 1 p.m. on Wednesdays at Lakeside Social, 9921 Blue Star Memorial Highway, South Haven.

Michigan Maritime Museum: free admission on the first Sunday of every month from November through April.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

Photos provided / Tom Renner

Isaac Chalupa eyes the basket in second half of the game against Niles Brandywine Wednesday night.

Levi De La Rosa drives the lane for a basket during Wednesday's game against Niles Brandywine.

January

12 – Basketball: Boys freshman basketball against Michigan Lutheran High School at 4 p.m.

12 – Basketball: Boys junior varsity basketball against Buchanan High School at 5:30 p.m.

12 – Basketball: Boys varsity basketball against Buchanan High School at 5:30 p.m.

13 – Swimming: Boys varsity swimming against Hastings High School at 6 p.m.

13 – Rotary Club: Morning meeting. Technical Manager with Wacker Chemie to present on how silicone is made and used.

14 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

14 – Bowling: Boys and girls varsity bowling against Allegan Public Schools at 4 p.m.

15 – Basketball: Boys freshman basketball against Allegan Public Schools at 4 p.m.

15 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity basketball against Allegan Public Schools at 5:30 p.m.

15 – Basketball: Boys junior varsity basketball against Allegan Public Schools at 7 p.m.

16 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy Play for preschoolers from 11 a.m. to noon.

18 – First Congregation UCC: Winter Concert Series featuring Edye and Mike at 3 p.m.

19 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

20 – Rotary Club: Evening meeting at the American Legion beginning at 530p. Todd Marcy to present on the Detroit Lions app.

20 – Basketball: Boys freshman basketball against Hastings High School at 4 p.m.

20 – Basketball: Girls middle school basketball against Saugatuck High School at 5 p.m.

20 – Basketball: Boys junior varsity basketball against Black River Public School at 5:30 p.m.

20 – Basketball: Boys varsity basketball against Black River Public School at 7 p.m.

20 – Swimming: Boys varsity swimming against Allegan Public School at 6 p.m.

21 – Wrestling: Boys and Girls varsity wrestling at 6 p.m.

22 – Basketball: Boys freshman basketball against Watervliet High School at 4 p.m.

22 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity basketball against Watervliet High School at 5:30 p.m.

22 – Basketball: Boys junior varsity basketball against Watervliet High School at 7 p.m.

22 – Bowling: Boys and girls varsity bowling against Parchment High School at 4 p.m.

23 – South Haven Memorial Library: South Haven Writers read-around from 1 to 4 p.m. New writers welcome.

24 – South Haven Memorial Library: Astronomy Club for kids starting at 11 a.m.

26 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

27 – Rotary Club: Morning meeting. Mike Sawyer to present on the Van Buren County Senior Services Ramp program.

27 – Wrestling: Boys and girls varsity wrestling at 6 p.m.

28 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

28 – Basketball: Girls middle school basketball against Black River Public School at 4 p.m.

28 – Basketball: Girls freshman basketball against Zeeland West High School at 4 p.m.

28 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity basketball against Zeeland West High School at 5:30 p.m.

28 – Basketball: Girls varsity basketball against Zeeland West High School at 7 p.m.

28 – Bowling: Boys and girls bowling against Martin Public School at 4 p.m.

29 – Basketball: Girls middle school basketball against Lakeshore High School at 5:30 p.m. All-area tournament.

30 – Basketball: Girls varsity basketball against Coloma High School: 6 p.m.

30 – Basketball: Boys varsity basketball against Coloma High School: 7:30 p.m.

30 – South Haven Memorial Library: Parent Cafes from 11 a.m. to noon. Snacks and engaging conversation about self-care, support and community resources. Free event. Kids can enjoy Stuffed Animal Story Time with the library staff during the event.

30-31 – Ice Breaker Festival

31 – South Haven Memorial Library: Once upon a winter event with games and activities from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

The Spotlight

A Weekly Guide To Services & Business Around Town.

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Meet our Pet of the Week, Bouncer!

Bouncer is our longest resident and is a special dog who deserves his moment. Around 5 years old and 64 pounds, Bouncer is a cancer survivor who came to us with several malignant tumors that needed to be removed. He's been through more than most, and he's come out the other side with a clean bill of health and a whole lot of love to give. While his name suggests nonstop energy, Bouncer does have a softer side as well. He still has a playful bounce, but what he really wants is to be close to his people. He loves ear massages, butt scratches, and just hanging out nearby. He walks well on a harness, keeps an eye on any suspicious squirrels, and can look a little intimidating at first glance, until you realize he's actually a total softie.

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Join Al-Van next Tuesday from 5-8 PM at Culver's! A portion of all proceeds during that time will be donated to support the animals at Al-Van Humane Society. Grab a bite, treat yourself, and help our pets at the same time!

Fur Ball 2026 is almost here. Join Al-Van Humane Society on February 21st for Breakfast at Tiffany's, a glamorous evening inspired by Audrey Hepburn herself. Enjoy dinner, a cash bar, live and silent auctions, and a high-energy dueling piano show, all in support of homeless pets. Tickets are limited, so don't wait. Get yours now at al-van.org/furball and be part of one of the most anticipated nights of the season.

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST

Purina dry dog food, Purina Puppy Chow and wet dog food (any brand)

AI agents arrived in 2025 – here's what happened and the challenges ahead in 2026

By THOMAS SERBAN VON DAVIER
Affiliated Faculty Member, Carnegie Mellon Institute for Strategy and Technology (The Conversation)

In artificial intelligence, 2025 marked a decisive shift. Systems once confined to research labs and prototypes began to appear as everyday tools. At the center of this transition was the rise of AI agents – AI systems that can use other software tools and act on their own.

While researchers have studied AI for more than 60 years, and the term "agent" has long been part of the field's vocabulary, 2025 was the year the concept became concrete for developers and consumers alike.

AI agents moved from theory to infrastructure, reshaping how people interact with large language models, the systems that power chatbots like ChatGPT.

In 2025, the definition of AI agent shifted from the academic framing of systems that perceive, reason and act to AI company Anthropic's description of large language models that are capable of using software tools and taking autonomous action. While large language models have long excelled at text-based responses, the recent change is their expanding capacity to act, using tools, calling APIs, coordinating with other systems and completing tasks independently.

This shift did not happen overnight. A key inflection point came in late 2024, when Anthropic released the Model Context Protocol. The protocol allowed developers to connect large language models to external tools in a standardized way, effectively giving models the ability to act beyond generating text. With that, the stage was set for 2025 to become the year of AI agents.

The milestones that defined 2025

The momentum accelerated quickly. In January, the release of Chinese model DeepSeek-R1 as an open-weight model disrupted assumptions about who could build high-performing large language models, briefly rattling markets and intensifying global competition. An open-weight model is an AI model whose training, reflected in values called weights, is publicly available. Throughout 2025, major U.S. labs such as OpenAI, Anthropic, Google and xAI released larger, high-performance models, while Chinese tech companies including Alibaba, Tencent, and DeepSeek expanded the open-model ecosystem to the point where the Chinese models have been downloaded more than American models.

Another turning point came in April, when Google introduced its Agent2Agent protocol. While Anthropic's Model Context Protocol focused on how agents use tools, Agent2Agent addressed how agents communicate with each other. Crucially, the two protocols were designed to work together. Later in the year, both Anthropic and Google donated their protocols to the open-source software nonprofit Linux Foundation, cementing them as open standards rather than proprietary experiments.

These developments quickly found their way into consumer products. By mid-2025, "agentic browsers" began to appear. Tools such as Perplexity's Comet, Browser Company's Dia, OpenAI's GPT Atlas, Copilot in Microsoft's Edge, ASI X Inc.'s Fellou, MainFunc.ai's Genspark, Opera's Opera Neon and others reframed the browser as an active participant rather than a passive interface. For example, rather than helping you search for vacation details, it plays a part in booking the vacation.

At the same time, workflow builders like n8n and Google's Antigravity lowered the technical barrier for creating custom agent systems beyond what has already happened with coding agents like Cursor and GitHub Copilot.

New power, new risks

As agents became more capable, their risks became harder to ignore. In November, Anthropic disclosed how its Claude Code agent had been misused to automate parts of a cyberattack. The incident illustrated a broader concern: By automating repetitive, technical work, AI agents can also lower the barrier for malicious activity.

This tension defined much of 2025. AI agents expanded what individuals and organizations could do, but they also amplified existing vulnerabilities. Systems that were once isolated text generators became interconnected, tool-using actors operating with little human oversight.

What to watch for in 2026

Looking ahead, several open questions are likely to shape the next phase of AI agents.

One is benchmarks. Traditional benchmarks, which are like a structured exam with a series of questions and standardized scoring, work well for single models, but agents are composite systems made up of models, tools, memory and decision logic. Researchers increasingly want to evaluate not just outcomes, but processes. This would be like asking students to show their work, not just provide an answer.

Progress here will be critical for improving reliability and trust, and ensuring that an AI agent will perform the task at hand. One method is establishing clear definitions around AI agents and AI workflows. Organizations will need to map out exactly where AI will integrate into workflows or introduce new ones.

Another development to watch is governance. In late 2025, the Linux Foundation announced the creation of the Agentic AI Foundation, signaling an effort to establish shared standards and best practices. If successful, it could play a role like the World Wide Web Consortium in shaping an open, interoperable agent ecosystem.

There is also a growing debate over model size. While large, general-purpose models dominate headlines, smaller and more specialized models are often better suited to specific tasks. As agents become configurable consumer and business tools, whether through browsers or workflow management software, the power to choose the right model increasingly shifts to users rather than labs or corporations.

The challenges ahead

Despite the optimism, significant socio-technical challenges remain. Expanding data center infrastructure strains energy grids and affects local communities. In workplaces, agents raise concerns about automation, job displacement and surveillance.

From a security perspective, connecting models to tools and stacking agents together multiplies risks that are already unresolved in standalone large language models. Specifically, AI practitioners are addressing the dangers of indirect prompt injections, where prompts are hidden in open web spaces that are readable by AI agents and result in harmful or unintended actions.

Regulation is another unresolved issue. Compared with Europe and China, the United States has relatively limited oversight of algorithmic systems. As AI agents become embedded across digital life, questions about access, accountability and limits remain largely unanswered.

Meeting these challenges will require more than technical breakthroughs. It demands rigorous engineering practices, careful design and clear documentation of how systems work and fail. Only by treating AI agents as socio-technical systems rather than mere software components, I believe, can we build an AI ecosystem that is both innovative and safe.

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Mininyx Doodle / Getty Images

FOCUS

Dreamstime / TNS

Government programs and private organizations like the National Disability Rights Network, the Americans with Disabilities Act National Network, and the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities help connect people with services and supports in their communities.

Wheelchair? Hearing aids? Yes.

'Disabled'? No way!

By PAULA SPAN
KFF Health News (TNS)

In her house in Ypsilanti, Michigan, Barbara Meade said, "there are walkers and wheelchairs and oxygen and cannulas all over the place."

Barbara, 82, has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, so a portable oxygen tank accompanies her everywhere. Spinal stenosis limits her mobility, necessitating the walkers and wheelchairs and considerable help from her husband, Dennis, who serves as her primary caregiver.

"I know I need hearing aids," Barbara added. "My hearing is horrible." She acquired a pair a few years ago but rarely uses them.

Dennis Meade, 86, is more mobile, despite arthritis pain in one knee, but contends with his own hearing problems. Similarly dissatisfied with the hearing aids he once bought, he said, "I just got to the point where I say, 'Talk louder.'"

But if you ask either of them a question included on a recent University of Michigan survey – "Do you identify as having a disability?" – the Meades answer promptly: No, they don't.

Disability "means you can't do things," Dennis said. "As long as you can work with it and it's not affecting your life that much, you don't consider yourself disabled."

Their daughter Michelle Meade, a rehabilitation psychologist and the director of the Center for Disability Health and Wellness at the university, accompanies her parents to medical appointments and tends to roll her eyes at their reluctance to acknowledge needing support.

Working with other researchers on the recent national poll has shown her how often older adults feel that they are not disabled despite ample evidence to the contrary.

The survey looked at nearly 3,000 Americans aged 50 and older and found that only a minority – fewer than 18 percent of participants over 65 – saw themselves as having a disability.

Yet their responses to the six questions that the Census Bureau's American Community Survey uses to track disability rates told a different story.

The survey asks whether respondents have difficulty seeing or hearing, limitations in walking or climbing stairs, difficulty concentrating or remembering, trouble dressing or bathing, difficulty working, or problems leaving the home.

In the university's survey, about a third of those aged 65 to 74 reported difficulty with one or more of those functions. Among those over 75, the figure was more than 44 percent.

Moreover, when respondents were asked about several additional health conditions that would require accommodations under the Americans With Disabilities Act, including respiratory problems or speech disorders, the proportion climbed even higher. Half the 65-to-74 group reported disabilities, as did about two-thirds of those over 75.

Yet only a sliver – fewer than 1 in 5 – of older adults had ever received an accommodation from their health care providers to which they are legally entitled under the ADA.

> **"As long as you can work with it and it's not affecting your life that much, you don't consider yourself disabled."**
>
> **DENNIS MEADE**

Even among the small minority who identified as disabled, only a quarter had asked for an accommodation (though a third received one, whether they asked or not).

"It's a familiar story," said Megan Morris, a rehabilitation researcher at NYU Langone Health and director of the Disability Equity Collaborative. When it comes to the way people describe themselves, "many people still feel like 'disability' is a dirty word," she said.

It's almost an American value to decline to seek help, even when the law requires that it be available, Michelle Meade added. Faced with a disability, she said, "we're supposed to toughen up and battle through it."

That may be particularly true among older Americans whose attitudes formed before the landmark ADA became law in 1990, or even before the 50-year-old Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, which guaranteed access to public education.

"It's going to be hard for that older generation," Morris said. "Disability was something that was locked away. Younger folks are more open to seeing disability as being part of a community."

In the University of Michigan survey, for instance, among people over 65 who had two or more disabilities, about half identified as a person with a disability. In the younger cohort, aged 50 to 64, it was 68 percent.

Why does that matter? "It greatly assists in health care settings if you disclose a disability and know to request an accommodation and support," said Anjali Forber-Pratt, the research director at the American Association of Health and Disability.

Such accommodations "can make a stressful situation easier," she added. They include mammography and X-ray machines that allow patients to remain seated, scales that wheelchair users can roll onto, examination tables that rise and lower so that patients don't have to step onto a footstool and swivel around.

Health care providers may also offer amplification devices for people with hearing loss, as well as magnifiers and large print materials for the visually impaired. Buildings themselves must be accessible. Practices can send a staff member with a wheelchair to help patients traverse long distances.

Even with a disability parking placard, "you hike in, you wait for the elevator, you hike to the office," said Emmie Poling, 75, a retired teacher in Menlo Park, California.

Because of arthritis and spinal stenosis, "I can't walk with an upright posture for more than a few minutes" without pain, she said. "I basically live on Tylenol." Yet when she makes an appointment and the scheduler asks if she will need assistance, Poling replies that she won't.

"My personal voice says, 'Come on, you can do it,'" she said.

Identifying as a person with a disability provides other benefits, advocates say. It can mean avoiding isolation and "being part of a community of people who are good problem-solvers, who figure things out and work in partnership to do things better," Meade said.

Government programs and private organizations like the National Disability Rights Network, the Americans with Disabilities Act National Network, and the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities help connect people with services and supports in their communities.

Several studies have found, too, that patients who identify as disabled have less depression and anxiety, higher self-esteem, and a greater sense of " self-efficacy " than disabled people who don't.

For years, despite a lifetime of surgeries for congenitally dislocated hips, as well as joint replacements and cancer treatment, Glenna Mills, an artist in Oakland, California, told herself that she was not disabled.

"I suffered a lot by denying that I couldn't walk very far," she recalled. Although walking caused pain in her knees, hips, and shoulders, "I didn't want people to see me as someone who couldn't keep up," she added.

But about 10 years ago, "I stopped worrying about that," said Mills, 82. "I was more willing to say, 'I can't do that activity. I can't walk that far.'" She bought a scooter that allowed her to take walks with her husband and dog, and to spend time in museums. "I'm happier now," she said.

More often, older Americans resist a label that could help improve their care. Even those who do request accommodations may find that enforcement of the ADA remains spotty, in part because patients don't always report violations.

The Meades, after years of pleading from their children, have made appointments to see an audiologist about new hearing aids.

But Poling intends to struggle on without seeking or accepting assistance. "I know that point will come," she said. "I'll attempt to surrender as gracefully as possible, given my personality."

Until then, she said, "the mental picture that's acceptable to me is not wanting to look like I'm disabled."

The New Old Age is produced through a partnership with The New York Times KFF Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs of KFF – the independent source for health policy research, polling and journalism. *©2025 KFF Health News. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.*

FOOD

GRETCHEN'S TABLE

SWEET AND SPICY KOREAN FRIED CHICKEN WILL FIRE YOU UP

By GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

Bold, spicy flavors have never been more in demand, especially when they add a global element to a dish. One of my favorite foods these days is Korean fried chicken, which I ate twice on a recent trip to New York City.

Celebrated for its crispy exterior and tender interior, Korean fried chicken has been a staple late-night snack in South Korea since the late 1970s and early '80s. It's typically known as "drinking food," or anju, though Koreans also enjoy the crispy pieces of meat with non-alcoholic drinks.

Sticky, gotta-lick-your-fingers-after-you-eat-it yangnyeom dak is especially popular. It's glazed in a spicy-sweet sauce made with Korean chili paste, golden (corn) syrup, ketchup and sugar that give Korean fried chicken its fireworks.

It's one of those dishes you order as an appetizer for the table, and after the first saucy taste, wish you could keep all for yourself.

In Korea, the dish is most often made with bone-in chicken thighs or wings that have been coated in a cornstarch mixture. Traditionally, the chicken is fried twice to take it to the next level of crunchiness.

I've adapted this recipe from my son Dan's favorite cookbook, "The Korean Cookbook" by Junghyun Park and Jungyoon Choi (Phaidon Press, $54.95), to use chunks of boneless, skinless chicken breast instead of bone-in, skin-on pieces for easier eating. In a break from tradition, it's only fried once before being tossed in the sauce.

So how did I achieve the thin, crispy texture that defines the dish? The coating is made with a packaged, cornstarch-based fried chicken mix commonly sold in Korea, which I bought on Amazon (but should also be available in well-stocked Asian markets).

You also can make the batter from scratch by mixing 1/2 cup cornstarch with 1/2 teaspoon baking powder, 1/2 cup all-purpose flour and 2 teaspoons kosher salt in a large bowl and whisking until it's well-combined. Then, add enough cold water (1/2 to 1 cup) until it has the consistency of thin paint.

My local grocery doesn't stock Korean soy sauce, which is a little lighter and saltier than Japanese or Chinese soy sauce. But no worries, my trusty bottle of all-purpose Kikkoman is always at the ready.

The cookbook's authors suggest eating half the chicken naked and the other half tossed in the sauce to enjoy the dish two different ways. If you like, you can garnish it with toasted sesame seeds and serve it alongside kimchi, pickled radishes or a spicy cucumber salad.

At restaurants, Korean fried chicken is often served as an appetizer; for dinner, it's great on a bed of steamed white rice.

Your mouth may burn a little after you take that first saucy bite, but it's so good you'll forget about it before reaching for another chunk.

Korean chicken can be enjoyed naked, or dressed in a spicy-sweet sauce.
Gretchen McKay / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette / TNS

Sweet and Spicy Korean Fried Chicken

FOR THE SAUCE:
3 tablespoons corn syrup
2 tablespoons ketchup
2 tablespoons gochujang (red chili paste)
2 tablespoons ganjang (Korean soy sauce)
1 tablespoon minced garlic
1/2 tablespoon fine gochugaru (red chili powder)
1 tablespoon sugar
FOR THE CHICKEN:
2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut into chunks
1 tablespoon MSG
1 teaspoon sugar
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
Neutral cooking oil for deep frying
11/2 cups Korean seasoned fried chicken mix

Make sauce: In a small saucepan, combine corn syrup, ketchup, gochujang, soy sauce, gochugaru, garlic and sugar.

Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring often. Once it's boiling, reduce heat to low and simmer for 3 minutes before removing from heat.

Prepare chicken: Pat chicken dry with paper towels. In a bowl, sprinkle chicken with MSG, sugar and black pepper and mix well. Let sit 15 minutes.

Pour 3 inches neutral oil into a large deep pot or deep fryer and heat to 355 degrees.

In a small bowl, stir together 6 1/2 tablespoons of the fried chicken mix and 4 tablespoons water to make a batter. Mix well until uniform. Add chicken pieces, and stir to combine.

Place the remaining 1 cup fried chicken mix in a large plastic bag.

Place half the chicken in the plastic bag and shake until well coated. Let settle for 30 seconds before removing from the bag, shaking off any excess. Repeat with the rest of the chicken.

Set a wire rack in a sheet pan. Once oil is up to temperature, reduce heat to medium-low. Add the chicken pieces and fry for 3-4 minutes, or until cooked through. Remove and set on the rack to cool for 3 minutes.

Sauce the chicken with the desired amount of sauce and toss well in a bowl.

Plate and serve immediately.

Adapted from "The Korean Cookbook" by Junghyun Park and Jungyoon Choi

GRETCHEN'S TABLE

Re-create Anthony Bourdain's beef bourguignon

By GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

One benefit of being a food editor is that I get the opportunity to try out recipes from the latest cookbooks, often before they have even made it onto store shelves. It keeps me on my toes with what's trending, and over the years it has had the fringe benefit of greatly expanding my culinary skills.

But these days, I'm also tempted on a daily basis by what ends up on my social media feeds.

Click once on a recipe that looks good, and thanks to algorithms that influence what pops up on your screen, chances are you'll be inundated with that chef or restaurant's content again and again.

Lately, for me, the late great Anthony Bourdain has been making regular appearances on my phone as I food scroll.

Known for his straight-talking, unpretentious take on cooking and exploration of global cuisine through his shows "No Reservations" and "Parts Unknown," Bourdain was and continues to be loved for his candid and (sometimes) unfiltered take on food. Home cooks also appreciate his practical cooking tips and techniques.

His recipe for beef bourguignon, which popped up on my screen a few days ago, is a great example.

Julia Child might be responsible for popularizing the classic, slow-cooked French stew in which chunks of beef shoulder are slowly braised in red wine with onions and carrots until the meat is tender enough to almost melt in your mouth. But Bourdain, with his devil-be-damned demeanor, somehow makes the dish feel approachable – even though the two chefs' recipes are pretty similar.

With the price of beef going up and up, this could be considered a special occasion dish for a chilly December night. But you also could substitute lean stewing beef. I was lucky to find a chuck roast on sale.

Be sure not to splurge on the wine for the stew – any good-quality inexpensive dry red wine will work in this dish. I used pinot noir, but cabernet sauvignon or merlot will also work even though they are not burgundies.

The stew tastes even better the second day.

Anthony Bourdain's Beef Bourguignon
Serves 8

2 pounds boneless beef shoulder or chuck, cut into 1 1/2 -inch pieces
Salt and pepper
1/4 cup olive oil
4 onions, thinly sliced
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 cup red burgundy wine such as pinot noir
6 carrots, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 garlic clove
1 bouquet garni
Demi-glace, optional
Chopped flat parsley

Season the meat with salt and pepper.

In a Dutch oven, heat oil over high heat until it is almost smoking. Add the meat, in batches – NOT ALL AT ONCE! – and sear on all sides until it is well browned (not gray). If you dump too much meat in the pot at the same time, you'll overcrowd it; cool the thing down and you won't get good color.

Sear the meat a little at a time, removing it and setting it aside as it finishes. When all the meat is a nice dark brown color and has been set aside, add onions to the pot.

Lower the heat to medium high until the onions are soft and golden brown, about 10 minutes.

Sprinkle flour over the onions. Continue to cook for about 4-5 minutes, stirring occasionally, then add red wine. Naturally, you want to scrape up all that really good fond from the bottom of the pot with your wooden spoon.

Bring the wine to a boil.

Return the meat to the pot and add carrots, garlic and bouquet garni. Add just enough water (and two big spoons of demi-glace if you have it) so that the liquid covers the meat by one-third – meaning you want a ratio of 3 parts liquid to 2 parts meat. This is a stew, so you want plenty of liquid, even after it cooks down and reduces.

Bring to a boil, reduce to a gentle simmer and let cook for about 2 hours or until the meat is break-apart-with-a-fork tender.

You should check the dish every 15 or 20 minutes, stirring and scraping the bottom of the pot to make sure the meat is not sticking or, even worse, scorching. You should also skim off any foam or scum or oil collecting on the surface using a large spoon or ladle.

When done, remove and discard the bouquet garni, add chopped parsley to the pot and serve.

"Anthony Bourdain's Les Halles Cookbook" by Anthony Bourdain

Gretchen McKay / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette / TNS
Beef bourguignon calls for four simple ingredients – beef, carrots, onions and red wine.

ENTERTAINMENT

Best 2025 albums were *AI-free*

By GEORGE VARGA
The San Diego Union-Tribune (TNS)

People would have laughed and rolled their eyes if the 1977 movie smash "Star Wars" had even suggested that – one day in the future, in a galaxy far, far away – hit records would be created entirely by artificial intelligence. More laughter would have ensued at the mere intimation that algorithms would choose much of the music you listened to, relegating your ears and aesthetic preferences to near-bystander status.

Who's laughing now?

In September, the independent record label Hallwood Media signed a multimillion-dollar contract with Xania Monet, an AI-generated singer and image.

Monet's "Let Go, Let God" and the possibly apocryphally titled "How Was I Supposed To Know?" scored on Billboard's Hot Gospel Songs and Adult R&B Airplay charts, respectively. Hallwood has signed deals with at least five other "AI artists," specifically, Bleeding Verse, China Styles, Lone Star Lyric House, Drew Meadows and David Sven. It remains to be seen how much competition Monet may encounter from AI Christian artist Solomon Ray.

In October, the first single by "A.I.-native pop artist" TaTa Taktumi – "Glitch x Pulse" was released who scored a hit album on iTunes with the apparently irony-free titled "Faithful Soul." In a not-irony-free twist, the video for "Glitch x Pulse" features a real-life human performer playing the role of TaTa.

With any luck, I am one of the few people to recall the 1991 album "The Look" by – ahem! – Barbie (as in the plastic Mattel doll). Alas, a promised concert tour by "Barbie and Ken" never materialized.

In November, "Walk My Walk" by Breaking Rust topped Billboard's Country Digital Song Sales chart, despite – or perhaps because – the song and the performer are both entirely AI-generated. Given how synthetic-sounding too much "real" country music has become, it's become increasingly difficult to determine what is or isn't AI-generated.

Not to be outdone, the AI rock band Velvet Sundown rapidly released three albums. Its most popular song, the Southern-rock-influenced "Dust On The Wind," has more than 2 million streams. Never mind that Velvet Sundown's updated social media pages describe it as a "synthetic music project guided by human creative direction, and composed, voiced, and visualized with the support of artificial intelligence."

Coming next, perhaps: "live" AI "concerts," performed for AI "audiences" and "reviewed" by AI "music critics."

The issue is not technology, which has long been an invaluable tool for creative artists. Rather, it's the misuse of technology by talent-free poseurs and greedy opportunists. That might be – at least for someone even more cynical than me – an apt description of an outsized chunk of pop music since the 1950s heyday of such photogenic, talent-challenged teen-pop stars as Fabian and Bobby Rydell.

The day when recordings are labeled " AI Generated," "AI Assisted" or "AI-Free" may soon be looming.

But as genre-leaping music icon Herbie Hancock put it in our 2024 San Diego Union-Tribune interview, AI may be a manifestation of a far more daunting challenge: "We have to learn to become better human beings," he said, "because the real problem is people, not AI."

In the meantime, here are my favorite albums of the year.

So far as I can tell – and assuming my avatar isn't writing this article – all of these albums were made the old-fashioned way by, you know, actual people.

Mavis Staples, 'Sad and Beautiful World'

Still touring at 86, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee Mavis Staples could easily rest on her laurels. Instead, the tireless gospel-music legend this year made one of the most stirring and rewarding albums of her storied career. Its title perfectly captures her ability to chronicle in song frustration and hope, despondency and transcendence, with soulful grace and grit.

Robert Plant & Saving Grace, featuring Suzi Dian, 'Saving Grace'

Like Mavis Staples, former Led Zeppelin singer and veteran solo star Robert Plant seemingly has nothing left to prove. But his first album with the newest of his many post-Zep bands is a mesmerizing work that makes gospel, Celtic folk, Americana, psychedelia, blues and North African music sound like interlocking parts of one wondrous musical whole.

Theo Bleckmann, 'Love and Anger'

An extraordinarily gifted singer, Theo Bleckmann has a wonderfully expressive and flexible voice. The reverence and daring with which he salutes and reimagines songs on "Love and Anger" by everyone from Kate Bush, The Beatles and Frank Ocean to Massive Attack, Henry Purcell and Labi Siffre is nothing sort of remarkable. And when he delivers a cascade of angelic vocal harmonies that suggest the apex of Brian Wilson and The Beach Boys, you may get goosebumps.

Geese, 'Getting Killed'

Witty and wry, apprehensive and inviting, accomplished and proudly off-kilter, the fourth album by the young New York rock quartet Geese is delivered with a wink, a nod, and the triumphant sound of a rising, compromise-free young band taking off like never before.

Ches Smith, 'Ches Smith Clone Row'

San Diego-born drummer and percussionist Ches Smith excels at way left-of-center rock, cutting-edge jazz, electronica, funk, experimental music and more. He expertly draws from all of them on "Clone Row" to create a wonderfully kinetic synthesis that at times suggests latter-day King Crimson at its thorniest, by way of avant-guitar shredder Sonny Sharrock. Better yet, on Smith's first album with his superb Clone Row band, he showcases two of the most audaciously inventive guitarists currently playing, Mary Halvorson and Liberty Ellman.

Cécile McLorin Salvant, 'Oh Snap'

Four years in the making, "Oh Snap" at times finds acclaimed young jazz singer Cécile McLorin Salvant channeling her inner Bjork and Kate Bush on 11 original songs and an ebullient take on The Commodores' classic "Brick House." No matter the style, Salvant is a one-off, as she demonstrated here with her absolutely stunning a cappella encore of Bush's "Wuthering Heights" at the 2025 edition of SummerFest in La Jolla.

Clipse, 'Let God Sort 'Em Out'

On its first album since 2009, this Bay Area hip-hop duo returns with a renewed sense of purpose and passion, plus enough crafty wordplay to make all but the most gifted rap wordsmiths turn pea green with envy.

Bad Bunny, 'Debì Tirar Màs Foto'

A musical valentine to his beloved Puerto Rican homeland and its rich musical traditions, Bad Bunny's most ambitious album is also his most personal and affecting. You can expect to hear at least a few songs from it when he headlines the Super Bowl halftime show telecast on Feb. 8.

I'm With Her, 'Wild and Clear and Blue'

When she's not making solo albums or working with her longtime band, Nickel Creek, San Diego-bred singer, violinist, cellist and organist Sara Watkins teams up with fellow troubadours Sarah Jarosz and Aoife O'Donovan in I'm With Her. The trio's second album is a gem of incandescent vocal harmonies and finely calibrated songs that draw from folk, chamber-pop and bluegrass that sound both earthy and elegant.

Hayden Pedigo, 'I'll Be Waving As Your Drive Away'

Texas-bred acoustic guitarist Hayden Pedigo excels at crafting gently chiming six-string reveries that intimately evoke the expansive, largely uninhabited prairies of his home state.

Also recommended

Trio Da Kali, "Bagola"; Brandi Carlile, "Returning To Myself"; Annie and The Caldwells, "Can't Lose My (Soul)"; Turnstile, "Never Enough"; Cynthia Erivo, "I Forgive You"; Bon Iver, "FABLE, Sable"; Sudan Archives, "The BPM"; Cate le Bon, "Michelangelo Dying"; Lucy Dacus, "Forever is a Feeling"; Viagra Boys, "Viagr Aboys"; Wet Leg, "Moisturizer"; Van Morrison, "Remembering Now"; and Horsegirl, "Phonetics On and On."

Mavis Staples performs on stage during a concert in the Azkena Rock Festival in the northern Spanish Basque city of Vitoria on June 22, 2024.
Ander Gillenea / AFP / Getty Images / TNS

The 14 movies we're most looking forward to in 2026

By AMY NICHOLSON, MARK OLSEN, JOSHUA ROTHKOPF, JOSH ROTTENBERG and GLENN WHIPP
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Even as the best films of 2025 linger in memory – it truly was a good year – we're not sorry to flip the calendar page. Bring on the new shiny stuff: epic Homeric hugeness from Chistopher Nolan and sci-fi aliens from Steven Spielberg. We await greatness from Greta (Gerwig, that is). And a Quentin Tarantino-David Fincher collab sounds perfectly fun to us. Here are the 2026 titles we jotted down quickly on the back of a cocktail napkin.

Warner Bros. Pictures / TNS

Jacob Elordi, left, and Margot Robbie in the movie "Wuthering Heights."

Lucasfilm / TNS

Anzellans Bai, left, Clang and Keeto with Grogu in a scene from "The Mandalorian and Grogu."

'Wuthering Heights' (Feb. 13)

Those howls in the moors are literature fans fighting over whether this reimagining of Emily Brontë's 1847 gothic romance will be confoundingly misguided or bodice-rippingly good. Either way, the latest provocation by Emerald Fennell ("Promising Young Woman," "Saltburn") is already triggering a reaction just from its trailer which boasted images of lobsters in top hats, Margot Robbie in period-scrambling red sunglasses and Jacob Elordi licking a wall. Tepid is not Fennell's thing. But so far, Fennell tends to be my thing – I admire directors who are game to take salacious swings. Will her "Wuthering Heights" wind up being a juicy but familiar adaptation of the obsessive love affair between newlywed Cathy and her rich and cruel neighbor, Heathcliff? Or should audiences be reading into the suspicious air quotes around the title? A Valentine's Day-adjacent opening hints it wants to make audiences hot and bothered.

– Amy Nicholson

'The Bride!' (March 6)

Classic monster tales have recently provided fresh inspiration for contemporary filmmakers ("Nosferatu," "Frankenstein") so now here comes Maggie Gyllenhaal's stylized, energetic reinvention of "The Bride of Frankenstein." (The title's exclamation point is how you know she's extra.) Reuniting the actor-turned-filmmaker with Jessie Buckley, one of the stars of Gyllenhaal's Oscar-nominated directing debut "The Lost Daughter," the story has been moved to 1930s Chicago with references to movies such as "Bonnie and Clyde" and "Wild at Heart" being thrown around to describe the movie's lovers-on-the-run variation on the storyline of a monster and his mate. With a cast that also includes Christian Bale as Frankenstein's creation along with Penélope Cruz and Annette Bening, this looks to be the kind of wild, imaginative leap that one wishes more filmmakers had the opportunity to go for regardless of the outcome.

– Mark Olsen

'Project Hail Mary' (March 20)

Bestselling sci-fi author Andy Weir has already supplied Hollywood with one radical idea: that watching someone think can be as gripping as watching things explode. Ridley Scott's 2015 adaptation of Weir's novel "The Martian" proved the point by turning competence and problem-solving into a mainstream hit with a wry sense of humor. "Project Hail Mary" pushes that idea further. Directed by Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, whose credits run from "21 Jump Street" to "The Lego Movie," the film stars Ryan Gosling as Ryland Grace, a former science teacher who wakes up alone on a spacecraft and slowly realizes he's been sent on a last-chance mission to save Earth. As in "The Martian," the story is built around trial and error and the scientific method. It also looks genuinely funny, an unusual combination for big studio sci-fi. In a market dominated by familiar brands, that in itself feels the best kind of hail Mary.

– Josh Rottenberg

'The Mandalorian and Grogu' (May 22)

Instead of doing a fourth season, the series pivoted, becoming a stand-alone feature with a prime Memorial Day weekend release – a sign of trust both in Jon Favreau's durable concept and a devoted streaming audience, one that hopefully still likes going out to movie theaters. Don't worry about never having seen a single episode. There's not much to get here: bounty hunter, baby Yoda. Despite the somewhat jarring presence of Sigourney Weaver in an early trailer, we wouldn't expect the Star Wars and Alien franchises to somehow be merging. Rather, redirect all your curiosity to the shocking fact that Jeremy Allen White is playing the son of Jabba the Hutt. Please let there be a cooking scene.

– Joshua Rothkopf

'Disclosure Day' (June 12)

I liked it better when this was simply known as "Untitled Steven Spielberg UFO movie." That's enough to sell a few hundred million dollars in tickets this summer and make me giddy with anticipation. We don't know much else at the moment, other than Spielberg is working again with "Jurassic Park" and "War of the Worlds" screenwriter David Koepp. The teaser promises crop circles, spooky animals, Colin Firth sporting a beard, government agents (no doubt hiding something) and Emily Blunt possessed by some kind of alien intelligence. It's ominous, and not just because it's giving off M. Night Shyamalan vibes. We're definitely not in "E.T." territory with this one.

– Glenn Whipp

'The Odyssey' (July 17)

After two decades of turning weighty subjects into box-office events – nuclear physics in "Oppenheimer" (2023), wormholes in "Interstellar" (2014) and a pivotal World War II evacuation in "Dunkirk" (2017) – Christopher Nolan has chosen a particularly audacious next project: adapting a poem composed nearly three thousand years ago, when stories were recited in verse rather than projected on screens. Homer's "The Odyssey" follows Odysseus, a Greek king trying to get home after the Trojan War, a journey interrupted by Cyclopes, sirens, shipwrecks and gods with grudges. It's a story built from vivid episodes and long delays, where danger and temptation matter as much as forward motion. Shot entirely on IMAX with a stacked cast featuring Matt Damon, Zendaya, Tom Holland, Robert Pattinson and Charlize Theron, the film will present Nolan with a distinct challenge: turning a story written 27 centuries ago into a modern epic that can thrill an audience today.

– J. Rottenberg

'Coyote vs. Acme' (Aug. 28)

Technically, one of my most-anticipated movies of 2026 is a rewatch. I lucked out and landed an invite to a "Coyote vs. Acme" cast-and-crew screening in November 2023 when there was hope that Warner Bros. might soon sell its controversially canceled cartoon to a new distributor. We all laughed ourselves silly as the Coyote sued the Acme Corporation over its defective merchandise. No longer will he suffer injuries in silence – although the Coyote's legal team, played by Will Forte and Lana Condor, do all of the talking against Acme's cocky defense attorney, John Cena. Director Dave Green and screenwriter Samy Burch ("May December") completely nailed Looney Tunes' manic antics while adding just the right amount of heart. Alas, the film's outlook continued to plummet and soar and plummet again like a jet-propelled pogo stick. When it finally arrives in theaters, I'll be strapping on my rocket-powered roller skates to get there as quick as possible.

– A.N.

'Digger' (Oct. 2)

Tom Cruise champions have been waiting for this movie, oh, give or take 25 years. That's the last time he was nominated for an Oscar for his darkly funny and emotional supporting turn as seduction guru Frank T.J. Mackey in "Magnolia." Cruise spent the first two decades of his career stretching himself artistically, never making a sequel until 2000's "Mission: Impossible II." More recently, the daredevil actor has focused on warm-up stretches, muscling his eight-film franchise to its explosive finale. His first post-Ethan Hunt challenge is this awards season-positioned project directed by Alejandro G. Iñárritu ("Birdman," "The Revenant"). The filmmaker has teased it's a "brutal, wild comedy of catastrophic proportions," promising news for fans who wondered why Cruise never made another movie like "Tropic Thunder." Here's hoping Cruise will remind himself to keep braving creative risks.

– A.N.

'Narnia: The Magician's Nephew' (Nov. 26; on Netflix Dec. TBA)

All eyes will be on Greta Gerwig – and should be – because there's an excellent chance she could follow up "Barbie" with something equally as inspired. We really know next to nothing about this one at this point: a dozen cast members (including Emma Mackey, Daniel Craig and maybe the voice of Meryl Streep) and some locations. For some reason, I'm not nervous. Gerwig made Louisa May Alcott's language her own for 2019's "Little Women" and I don't expect her to subjugate her signature voice to C.S. Lewis' fantasy. Fans of the Chronicles know this installment to be both breezier and loaded with religious symbolism. Give it a whirl. The talking animals will see you through.

– J. Rothkopf

'Dune: Part Three' (Dec. 18)

With Denis Villeneuve at the helm, the first two "Dune"films earned more than $1.1 billion worldwide and picked up 15 Oscar nominations, including two for best picture, turning Frank Herbert's famously unadaptable science-fiction novel into a blockbuster franchise. The trilogy's finale is where that success gets tested. The story moves forward in time, with Paul Atreides now emperor, trapped in a position of power he never wanted and presiding over a holy war carried out in his name. Timothée Chalamet returns alongside Zendaya and Florence Pugh as the film turns away from conquest and toward consequence. In Herbert's original sequel book, 1969's "Dune: Messiah," that turn frustrated many readers who expected another triumph and instead found a story that deliberately refused an easy payoff. Villeneuve has spent years laying the groundwork for this moment. The question now is whether he can turn a divisive book into an ending that feels suitably epic and genuinely satisfying.

– J. Rottenberg

'Werwulf' (Dec. 25)

Robert Eggers calls his upcoming medieval werewolf movie the "darkest thing I have ever written, by far." Let that sink in for a moment. Eggers' filmography includes the suffocating madness found in "The Witch" and "The Lighthouse" and the chilling terror of a malevolent, shape-shifting, lustful vampire in "Nosferatu." These are not light movies. So what are we in store for here? Apparently a member of Eggers' sound team said he needed a hug after reading the "Werwulf" script. I couldn't verify this, but I want this to be true. There will be blood and fog. One other thing we know is the setting: 13th century England, which means that the film's dialogue will be in Middle English. How farest thou with that? I'm sure the cast, which includes Eggers regulars Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Lily-Rose Depp, Willem Dafoe and Ralph Ineson, had fun, verily.

– G.W.

'The Adventures of Cliff Booth' (TBA)

Do we need a stand-alone Cliff Booth movie? Quentin Tarantino thinks so, though not enough to direct the sequel he wrote to his hit 2019 film "Once Upon a Time … in Hollywood." That's OK, however, since Brad Pitt, who won an Oscar for playing Booth, enlisted David Fincher to sub in. It'll be their fourth collaboration, following "Seven," "Fight Club" and "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," a track record that offers some optimism that a film elevating Booth from Rick Dalton's loyal sidekick to a leading character is an idea worth pursuing. (Leonardo DiCaprio apparently turned down an offer to reprise Dalton in a cameo.) If nothing else, the movie's 1977 setting, eight years after the events in "Once Upon a Time," will give us the chance to revel in another glorious L.A. time capsule.

– G.W.

'The Entertainment System Is Down' (TBA)

Sweden's Ruben Östlund ("Force Majeure," "The Square," "Triangle of Sadness") makes jabbing social satires that inspire love-it-or-hate-it responses. The last thing his films tend to do is leave audiences flat. His latest is set on a long-haul flight where the on-board entertainment system breaks down and passengers are forced to confront their boredom and themselves. The cast includes Keanu Reeves, Kirsten Dunst, Daniel Brühl, Nicholas Braun and Samantha Morton, and supposedly a decommissioned 747 airliner was purchased for the production. A24 has the U.S. distribution rights and Östlund has said he wants to win an unprecedented third Palme d'Or, so a Cannes premiere makes sense. Combining Östlund's taste for the outrageous and absurd with this simple yet terrifyingly relatable premise may make this the year's truest horror film.

– M.O.

'Her Private Hell' (TBA)

It is hard to believe that it's been a full decade since Danish director Nicolas Winding Refn's last feature film, 2016's "The Neon Demon," a disorienting treatise on fame and Los Angeles. Even having made two single-season streaming series in the interim, he has seemingly been missing in action, the absence of his visual flair, bent humor and taste for provocation leaving an empty space in theaters. So it is welcome news that he will be back at some point this year with "Her Private Hell." Aside from a brief teaser promising "something groovy," little is known regarding what the movie is about. Refn shot in Tokyo in 2025 with a cast that includes Charles Melton, Sophie Thatcher, Kristine Froseth and Havana Rose Liu with music by Italian composer Pino Donaggio (famous for his '80s work with Brian De Palma). The film will be released by Neon, which has had a chokehold on Cannes in recent years, so that makes the festival a likely a place for Refn to unleash "Hell."

– M.O.

TV shows we're excited for in 2026

By ROBERT LLOYD, GREG BRAXTON, MAIRA GARCIA, TRACY BROWN, KAITLYN HUAMANI, YVONNE VILLARREAL and MARY MCNAMARA
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

It's the start of a new year and that means the kickoff of a whole new slate of television series. And while 2026 will bring plenty of those, it will also yield revivals, new seasons of beloved shows, spinoffs and long-awaited finales. Though this list isn't exhaustive by any means, and not all dates have been announced, there's plenty to start penciling into your calendar.

Jeff Weddell / Disney / TNS

Zach Braff, top, and Donald Faison in the "Scrubs" revival.

'Star Trek: Starfleet Academy' (Jan. 15, Paramount+)

In these awful, uncertain times, it is heartening that "Star Trek," that most good-hearted, proudly progressive of space operas, continues to create new missions for fresh multiplanetary crews of explorers. The latest series, set like "Star Trek: Discovery" in the far-flung 32nd century, when anything the writers need created can be, takes place both in San Francisco – where the rebuilt Starfleet Academy is welcoming its first new class in more than 100 years – and aboard a training starship, the USS Athena, which will presumably carry cadets into situations more dangerous than rush week or beer pong. Tig Notaro's engineer Jett Reno, surviving from "Star Trek: Discovery," and Robert Picardo's holographic doctor way back from "Star Trek: Voyager," are seen here, as are several new young actors for youth appeal and Holly Hunter, as the academy chancellor and starship captain, for the "Broadcast News" fans. The voice of Stephen Colbert, making announcements as the Digital Dean of Students, is heard, and Paul Giamatti puts on prosthetics to play the villain.

– Robert Lloyd

'Memory of a Killer' (Jan. 25, Fox)

Former " Grey's Anatomy " heartthrob Patrick Dempsey trades in his "McDreamy" scrubs for a high-powered rifle in Fox's thriller drama. Inspired by the 2003 Belgian film "De Zaak Alzheimer," the drama features Dempsey as Angelo Ledda, a New York City hit man facing a devastating dilemma: he has early Alzheimer's. The disease complicates his deadly profession and his life as a low-key family man. With a cast that includes Michael Imperioli ("The Sopranos") and Gina Torres ("Suits"), the trailer looks particularly intriguing, with Dempsey looking intense while backed by the Who's "Behind Blue Eyes." Fox is spotlighting the series with a two-night premiere; the first episode airs following the NFC Championship game. The second episode airs Jan. 26 as the drama settles into its regular slot on Mondays at 9 p.m.

– Greg Braxton

'Scrubs' revival (Feb. 25, ABC)

Ready for another walk through the halls of Sacred Heart Hospital with J.D., Elliot, Turk, Dr. Cox and Carla? The 30-minute sitcom was a comfort watch throughout much of the early aughts, with an endless loop of reruns keeping the show alive in the minds of fans long after it was canceled in 2010. But now ABC is bringing back the medical sitcom nearly 16 years later for a 10th season, and a lot of familiar faces are returning too: Zach Braff, Sarah Chalke and Donald Faison will reprise their lead roles, and John C. McGinley and Judy Reyes will make guest appearances. But not all is the same – several new cast members will join "Scrubs," including Vanessa Bayer ("Saturday Night Live," "I Love That for You") and Joel Kim Booster ("Fire Island," "Loot"). As long as J.D.'s daydreams and goofy bromance with Turk remain, I'm all in.

– Maira Garcia

'Monarch: Legacy of Monsters' Season 2 (Feb. 27, Apple TV)

It's been two years since the first season of "Monarch: Legacy of Monsters" ended with a surprise two-year time jump and I've been waiting to see what's next for the extended Randa clan ever since. The Monsterverse series follows Cate Randa (Anna Sawai) – a survivor of a Godzilla encounter – trying to learn the truth about her father Hiroshi's (Takehiro Hira) disappearance with the help of her newly discovered half-brother Kentaro (Ren Watabe) and ex-pat hacker May (Kiersey Clemons). It turns out the Randa family legacy is intertwined with Godzilla as well as Monarch, a secret organization dedicated to studying the giant monsters known as Titans. The possibility of kaiju battles was definitely what initially drew me to the show, but the humans have kept me hooked. Season 1 ended with Cate reuniting with her brother and father after escaping a mysterious pocket world beneath Earth's surface with her long-lost grandmother Keiko (Mari Yamamoto) in tow. If that is not the setup for some gloriously messy family drama, I don't know what is – and that's not even taking into account a potential love triangle. But don't fret monster lovers, the presence of Kong has also been teased for Season 2.

– Tracy Brown

'American Love Story' (February, FX)

The latest iteration of Ryan Murphy's "American Story" anthology will focus on John F. Kennedy Jr. and Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, whose relationship and untimely deaths in 1999 created a media frenzy. (The couple died in a plane crash that Kennedy was piloting – the cause of death was deemed pilot error, but with no survivors, we'll never know with 100 percent certainty.) Though their deaths occurred more than two decades ago, the event remains a significant moment in the memories of Americans and the Kennedy family, which has endured numerous tragedies over the decades. While Kennedy family members have openly criticized the series, it hasn't stopped Murphy from proceeding. The television creator knows how to pique viewers' interest, often dramatizing notable people and events. The series stars Sarah Pidgeon as Bessette, newcomer Paul Kelly as Kennedy and Naomi Watts as matriarch Jackie Kennedy.

– M.G.

'Y: Marshals' (March 1, CBS), 'Dutton Ranch' (2026, Paramount+)

More than a year has passed since "Yellowstone" rode off into the sunset. The modern Western was television's hottest series during its five-season run, solidifying the star power of its lead Kevin Costner as patriarch John Dutton while establishing co-creator Taylor Sheridan as one of TV's top writer-producers. Sheridan hopes to continue his "Yellowstone" triumph with several spinoffs. Kelly Reilly and Cole Hauser will reprise their respective roles as Dutton's volcanic daughter Beth Dutton and her husband, boss ranch hand Rip Wheeler, in Paramount+'s "Dutton Ranch." Luke Grimes, who played Dutton's son Kayce Dutton, will headline "Y: Marshals" in which Kayce joins a top U.S. Marshals unit. Joining Grimes in the CBS drama are "Yellowstone" cast members Gil Birmingham (Thomas Rainwater) and Mo Brings Plenty (Mo). Also in development is "The Madison," a drama starring Michelle Pfeiffer and Kurt Russell about a New York City family living in Montana's Madison River territory.

– G.B.

'Imperfect Women' (March 18, Apple TV)

If you're longing for the elusive Season 3 of "Big Little Lies" or a similar crime-laced psychological thriller led by powerhouse women, Apple TV might be able to scratch that itch with this upcoming drama. Based on Araminta Hall's novel of the same name, "Imperfect Women" will follow three lifelong friends, played by Kerry Washington, Elisabeth Moss and Kate Mara, as a murder sends their lives into chaos. Moss and Washington also serve as executive producers with Hall. Details about the plot of the series are scant (it is a mystery, after all), but the novel teases a story with deep betrayal and guilt, a secret affair and muddled perspectives, all underpinned by a murder investigation. That all sounds pretty dark, but Moss said the series will somehow be a "fantastic palate-cleanser" after the close of her dystopian drama "The Handmaid's Tale." "Imperfect Women" is "super different," she added. "It's fun, it's sexy."

– Kaitlyn Huamani

'The Forsytes' (March 22, PBS)

Written by Debbie Horsfield ("Poldark"), this is, as far as I can tell, a freely adapted, female-forward prequel to John Galsworthy's "Forsyte Saga" novels, which provided the basis for a highly popular, 26-part adaptation in 1967 and subsequent filmings in 2002 and 2003. Set among a late Victorian-era family of stockbrokers, a phrase that will undoubtedly bring the word "succession" to mind, it promises to be a meaty, cheesy and handsomely dressed – sometimes undressed – romp. The large ensemble cast includes Francesca Annis, Stephen Moyer, Tuppence Middleton, Eleanor Tomlinson, Jack Davenport, "Doctor Who" companion Millie Gibson and Susan Hampshire, who starred in and won an Emmy for the 1967 series.

– R.L.

'Margo's Got Money Troubles' (April 15, Apple TV)

Ever look at a television title and think: "It's great to see myself represented on TV?" The actual premise of this series may feel less relatable on the surface to most, but the struggle to stretch a dollar like it's made of industrial-use elastic is a conundrum many of us know all too well these days. And this new series from prolific TV producer David E. Kelley promises humor and heart in its adaptation of Rufi Thorpe's novel of the same name, which explores sex work and financial precarity without moralization. The series stars Elle Fanning as the titular character, a recent college dropout from a working-class background who, as a new mom raising a baby solo, is forced to figure out how to make ends meet and finds a financial lifeline as a creator for OnlyFans, the subscription-based platform made famous by adult content. The series also features Michelle Pfeiffer as Margo's mother (an ex-Hooters waitress) and Nick Offerman as her father (an ex-pro wrestler). And to ensure she's not letting 2026 go by without adding a stamp to her TV punch card, Nicole Kidman is also part of the stacked cast. Because we need that, all of us.

– Yvonne Villarreal

'The Testaments' (April 2026, Hulu)

The success of Bruce Miller's award-winning adaptation of Margaret Atwood's " The Handmaid's Tale " prompted the author to write the Booker Prize-winning sequel "The Testaments," which Miller is also adapting. Set to premiere in April, it returns viewers to the Old Testament world of Gilead, years after the events in "The Handmaid's Tale," and focuses on June's (Elisabeth Moss) daughters Hannah, renamed Agnes (Chase Infiniti), and Daisy, previously known as Nicole (Lucy Halliday), as they face the brutal forces of a misogynistic theocracy. Ann Dowd reprises her role as Aunt Lydia, the only character (with the possible exception of June) who will cross over from the previous series. Miller has characterized the series as a "coming of age" story, but readers of the book will know that all is not what it once was in Gilead; forces both without and within plot its downfall and June's daughters will not be far from the fight.

– Mary McNamara

'Beef' Season 2 (2026, Netflix)

Three years after gifting us a darkly comic road rage thriller fronted by Steven Yeun and Ali Wong that was set against a soundtrack of NSYNC, Tori Amos and Hoobastank songs, Lee Sung Jin's anthology series returns for its second season with another layered, twist-filled exploration of class struggles, resentment and the absurdity of life's curveballs. Consisting of eight 30-minute episodes, this season unpacks the pursuit of the American dream by way of an exclusive Southern California country club and two couples from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The chaos kicks off when a young couple who work at the club (Cailee Spaeny and Charles Melton) witness a heated fight between their boss (Oscar Isaac), the general manager, and his wife (Carey Mulligan), an interior designer, just as the club's new Korean billionaire owner (Youn Yuh-jung) takes over. The encounter spins out into a web of favors and coercion in this tale of broken systems and characters going to great lengths to get what they want. "Parasite's" Song Kang-ho and K-pop star BM (of KARD) round out the cast. And yes, there will be needle drops.

– Y.V.

'Little House on the Prairie' (2026, Netflix)

It's beyond time that someone revisited the semi-autobiographical series by Laura Ingalls Wilder in a way more suited to modern television. The 1974 NBC adaptation is a classic, but as a family drama of its time, it did not attempt to capture the historical breadth the book series documented. The many tribulations, and triumphs, the Ingalls family experienced as they moved from state to state, (including the locust plague of 1874, described in "On the Banks of Plum Creek," which devastated the Midwest) provide a unique look into life on the American "frontier." With any luck, showrunner Rebecca Sonnenshine and her team of writers will do the same.

– M.M.

'Something Very Bad Is Going to Happen' (2026, Netflix)

Fans of the nearly 10-year long "Stranger Things" chapter on Netflix are sure to be feeling a bit of Duffer Brothers withdrawal in the new year. But their overall deal with Netflix will bear another intriguing project before the creators move over to Paramount exclusively. "Something Very Bad Is Going to Happen" is a horror drama centering on a soon-to-be bride and groom, although the title seems to imply they never make it to the altar. The Duffer Brothers, Matt and Ross, and Hilary Leavitt from Upside Down Pictures are executive producing along with Haley Z. Boston, who will serve as showrunner. Boston has written on "Guillermo del Toro's "Cabinet of Curiosities" and "Brand New Cherry Flavor," both of which attracted avid horror fans. Camila Morrone ("Daisy Jones & the Six," "The Night Manager") stars alongside Adam DiMarco ("The White Lotus," "Overcompensating"). Very few other details have been shared, but the talent involved – both behind the scenes and in front of the camera – is enough to pique my curiosity, even if I'll have to close my eyes when things get a little too scary for my comfort.

– K.H.

'Yellowjackets' Season 4 (2026, Showtime)

I thought high school was traumatizing enough, but I didn't have to deal with anything close to what the teens in " Yellowjackets " have endured for three seasons. The coming-of-age survival thriller is about a championship high school soccer team whose plane crashes into the remote Canadian wilderness where they are stranded for 19 months. The story unfolds over two timelines, with one following the girls as they do whatever it takes to survive in the wilds – including cannibalism and ritual sacrifice – and the other following the survivors in the present day as they are trying to live their lives. Unfortunately for them, whatever they started in the wilderness is unwilling to be left buried in the past and is back on the h(a)unt. There is plenty of rage, trauma, secrets and murder in both timelines, as well as some unsolved mysteries that may or may not involve supernatural elements. With the upcoming fourth season confirmed to be the last, here's to hoping some of the remaining questions – including how the girls were saved, how many girls actually survived, and why the "wilderness" came back to them in the present day – will be answered.

– T.B.

'VisionQuest' (2026, Disney+)

It feels like forever ago that " WandaVision " kicked off Marvel Studios' foray into television with a bang. A clever homage to sitcoms, the show followed Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen) as she tried to magically piece together a life and family with Vision (Paul Bettany) after the events of "Avengers: Endgame" (2019). The upcoming Disney+ series "VisionQuest" will cap off the "WandaVision" trilogy, which also includes one of my favorite MCU installments, " Agatha All Along." When audiences last saw Vision, the reconstructed android had just regained his memories and, presumably, his sentience, before flying off into the unknown. The new series will see Vision trying to navigate that aftermath to figure out who he is – reportedly with some help from other known Marvel AI programs and robots. Both "WandaVision" and "Agatha" explored grief and trauma and motherhood in their own ways, so I'm curious how these themes might carry over into "VisionQuest." I'm admittedly a bit more into witches than robots, but I'm looking forward to the proper introduction of Tommy Shepherd (Ruaridh Mollica), who in the comics is the grown-up version of one of Wanda and Vision's magically-created twins, and any potential family reunions.

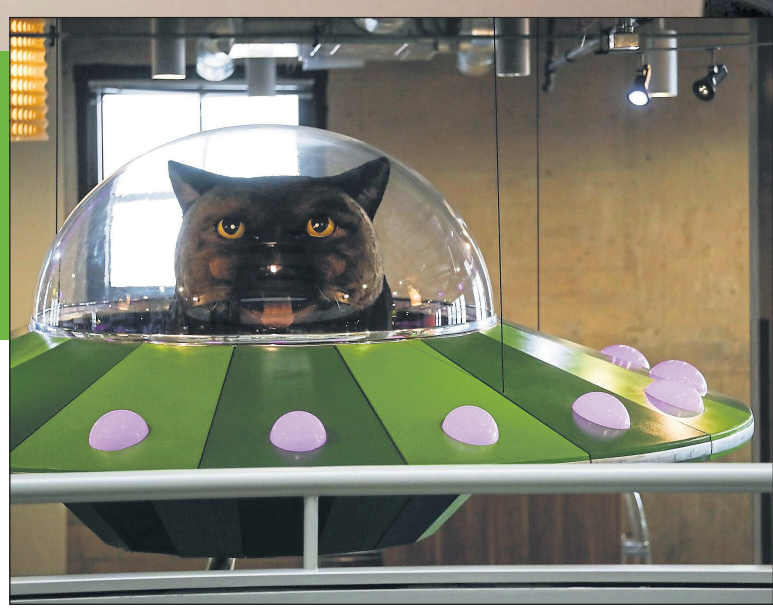
– T.B.

TECHNOLOGY

Employees take part in a sales training program at the Groupon office on Wacker Drive in Chicago on Dec. 9.
Eileen T. Meslar / Chicago Tribune / TNS

Call it a comeback

Tucked away in a downtown Chicago office building, fallen e-commerce star Groupon is plotting its return



Jose M. Osorio / Chicago Tribune / TNS
A cat in a spaceship is at Groupon's old office in Chicago on Nov. 14, 2018.

By ROBERT CHANNICK
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

Inside Groupon's 2-year-old headquarters on the 25th floor of the Leo Burnett Building in downtown Chicago, a giant cat in a spaceship with flashing lights greets visitors in an otherwise staid office tower.

Here, the quirky e-commerce startup once dubbed the fastest-growing company ever, amid Super Bowl ads and ubiquitous media coverage, is quietly executing a turnaround after years of downsizing and red ink. Groupon is trying to become the next big thing once again. It happened once before.

"We're at a point now in our journey where we have some victories, we have some things to look at, some proof points," Groupon's chief financial officer, Rana Kashyap, said during a recent tour of the newly expanded headquarters. "And everyone loves a comeback story."

In 2023, Groupon, whose daily deals platform made it the startup star of the post-millennium Chicago tech scene, was teetering on the brink of insolvency.

A groundbreaking unicorn that once spurned a $6 billion takeover offer from Google on its way to a $25 billion valuation, Groupon had fallen to a fraction of its previous worth amid dramatic downsizing and sharp revenue declines.

When Dusan Senkypl, a Czech investor and the company's largest shareholder, took control of the struggling e-commerce site and announced a turnaround strategy, Groupon issued a "going concern" warning to investors in May 2023 that the company could be out of business within a year.

"It was not a great situation for the business," said Kashyap, 43, a New York-based former hedge fund investor who joined Groupon in January 2023 under Senkypl's leadership. "Things were pretty grim."

Groupon's turnaround strategy included cost-cutting measures, such as breaking the lease on its massive River North headquarters at 600 W. Chicago Ave., once teeming with thousands of millennial employees. In January 2024, Groupon moved downtown to sublease a 25,000-square-foot floor of the Leo Burnett Building at 35 W. Wacker Drive, with a local workforce that had dwindled to 150 employees.

Like an expiring deal for a mani-pedi, Groupon itself seemed to be running out of time. But two years later, Groupon is still there and the turnaround is gaining traction, Kashyap said.

Once called the fastest-growing company in history by major media outlets, Groupon became a cautionary tech rise-and-fall story. Some analysts thought an epitaph was in the works. But last year, the company resolved its going-concern issues through belt-tightening measures, and is now ready to write a new chapter.

The downsizing is done and the focus has turned to growing revenues and expanding its reach, with the Chicago market providing a model for making the Groupon name relevant again in the competitive world of e-commerce it once pioneered.

The Chicago headquarters has more than doubled to 377 employees, including sales, finance and other roles. Most work two to four days a week in the busy office, which added a second floor this year to accommodate the increased activity.

Kashyap, who joined Groupon as senior vice president and head of transformation, was elevated to chief financial officer in September, filling the role vacated by Jiri Ponrt, a partner with Senkypl in Prague-based Pale Fire Capital, Groupon's largest investor, who moved up to chief operating officer.

Ponrt relocated to Chicago, grabbing an office to oversee operations at Groupon's new headquarters, where he has been commuting to work each day in a Chevy Suburban. Meanwhile, Kashyap remains New York-based, with plans to be in the Chicago office 100 days next year in his new role as CFO. Both see 2026 as pivotal for Groupon 2.0.

"There was lots of work here internally to put processes in place and also cut the cost, and now we are focusing purely on revenue," Ponrt said.

Groupon the Cat, a whimsical giant cat in a spaceship that hung from the fourth-floor atrium at the old headquarters, also made the move downtown – at new CEO Senkypl's urging – stationed at the modest entrance to the 25th floor.

While it is getting busier and bigger, the downtown office tower is still a long way from where Groupon was as a stratospheric tech startup in the early days of e-commerce, with an origin story made for the new millennium.

In 2007, Andrew Mason, then a recent Northwestern University music grad, started a website called The Point with $1 million in seed money from tech entrepreneur Eric Lefkofsky. The initial concept was to catalyze support for common causes, but the mission soon pivoted to a daily deals retailing site.

Groupon launched in 2008, creating its own e-commerce niche with heavily discounted daily deals on everything from manicures to meals, blasted out to subscribers via email. It exploded in popularity and employment grew from a handful to more than 11,000 worldwide as the company's valuation blossomed into the billions.

Google tried to purchase Groupon for nearly $6 billion in 2010, but Mason and his investors said no deal.

By 2011, Groupon was flying high, generating billions in annual revenue and cultivating a quirky culture that drew thousands of millennials to its new headquarters in the former Montgomery Ward catalog warehouse, a collegial frat house of a workplace that became the mecca of the burgeoning Chicago tech scene.

Groupon went public in November 2011, raising $700 million and reaching a market valuation north of $17 billion on its first day of trading.

For investors – and the company – it's been mostly downhill from there. Operating losses, management missteps – including a disastrous 2011 Super Bowl ad – and a rapid post-IPO decline in valuation led to the 2013 ouster of Mason as CEO.

Early on, the business model expanded to include stocking and shipping products, which put it in direct competition with online retail giant Amazon. While Groupon Goods grew to become the lion's share of the company's revenue, it proved less profitable than the local third-party deals on which the company was established.

Gross billings peaked at $7.5 billion and revenue topped $3 billion in 2014. By 2019, the last prepandemic year, billings had fallen to $4.6 billion and revenue was $2.2 billion.

During the pandemic, billings plummeted and downsizing accelerated amid operating losses and dwindling cash reserves. By the time Czech investor Senkyl took control of Groupon in 2023, billings had fallen to $1.65 billion, while revenue dropped to about $515 million. A global workforce that once topped 11,000 was down to 2,213 employees, including 229 in Chicago.

At its 2023 nadir, a company once worth $25 billion had a market cap of about $100 million.

Billings bottomed at $1.56 billion, while revenue dropped to $492 million in 2024. But this year, both numbers are on the rise, with projected billings of $1.6 billion and $500 million in revenue. Kashyap said the company has reached positive free cash flow for the first time in years, and the turnaround is finally taking hold, with the Chicago market leading the way.

During the third quarter, billings growth across North America was up 18 percent and Chicago, Groupon's largest and fastest-growing market, nearly doubled the national rate. A supply-driven business, Groupon is finding success by offering more local third-party deals that resonate online with customers, Kashyap said.

Meanwhile, the company has shifted away from its goods business, ceding that turf to a plethora of online competitors that have sprung up since Groupon launched 17 years ago.

Things To Do is Groupon's largest category, offering experiences like boat tours, museums and other activities with a strong value proposition. Groupon also does brisk business in the Beauty and Health category, a core offering since inception.

King Spa & Sauna in northwest suburban Niles, for example, has been using Groupon for 15 years. The current offering is a 38 percent discount on admission to the "largest Korean-inspired spa in the U.S," featuring sauna rooms, thermal pools and revitalizing treatments.

Groupon is looking to build up its offerings in other categories as well, including food and drink, hotels and live events, Kashyap said.

Charged with recruiting those deals for multiple markets, new hires are undergoing sales training in the Chicago office to reach local merchants and get them on the platform.

Sales director Sarah Neligan, who has been with Groupon for 12 years, moved from Ireland to the Chicago office a year and a half ago to head up new business development for the eastern half of the U.S.

"What Groupon does for local merchants is even more required now than it ever has been," Neligan said during an impromptu stop-and-chat. "All local merchants are competing against these bigger players in the market, and we really do offer them a solution for smaller businesses with no upfront costs on how to grow their business."

Neligan helped develop the new local market sales focus in Chicago, creating a playbook that Groupon plans to roll out in other cities.

As the company shifts from cutting costs to growing sales, Groupon has also recently ventured a modest return to TV advertising, something the startup once tried in a very big way.

Groupon aired its first Super Bowl ad in February 2011 – four months before the company filed for its IPO. The irreverent spot – a faux public service announcement for the endangered Tibetan people that shifted to a deal on fish curry – landed with a thud, precipitating a downward spiral that led to a rapid decline in valuation, the 2013 exit of Mason and a series of shifts in the business model.

In 2018, Groupon returned to the Super Bowl with a new TV ad featuring actress Tiffany Haddish, and a renewed focus on its daily-deals roots, but the company essentially went dark as business declined during the pandemic.

The new 30-second commercials are airing in Chicago, New York and Madrid, promoting generic discounted experiences such as spa days and date nights, while urging viewers to "Turn Life On With Groupon." The essentially identical spots are customized for each market by dropping in a few landmark shots, such as The Bean in Chicago.

Groupon ran its first ill-fated Super Bowl ad three years after launching and Kashyap said the company is thinking like a startup again. But getting back to the Super Bowl may take some time for Groupon 2.0, he said.

"It's not going to be next year," Kashyap said. "From where we are today to the ultimate of TV advertising, the Super Bowl, there's a long way from where we are to that. But we like to believe that that's in the realm of possibility here."

AI is coming – are you ready?

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Everybody has heard about artificial intelligence, but AI is just now starting to hit the mainstream.

AI has started to creep into my online life lately, and it is changing the way I search for things online and converse with virtual assistants. You might find these in your online life as well.

Google

We are all used to searching with Google. Type in a few words on a topic and you'll get a list of links to explore – but lately there's another option.

On my Google search page, there is an AI mode that will attempt to parse through the search results and actually give you the best answer to your query and not just return a list of links.

When I type, "What kind of oil should I use in a 2010 Mini Cooper?" the AI answer was, "For a 2010 Mini Cooper, you should use full synthetic oil with a viscosity of 5W-30 or 5W-40." This is the correct answer.

I'm not saying every answer will be right, but I appreciate Google is trying to actually help.

Give it a try.

Comet browser

Perplexity is a good AI platform by itself, and now they have their own browser called Comet, which is built on the Google Chrome browsing engine, so you can import your Chrome extensions, passwords and bookmarks.

Comet has a basic set of AI skills with the free version. You can use it to ask search questions, summarize content or translate whatever is in your browser window.

There are more features available if you subscribe, and there are a variety of subscription levels for personal, educational and business use.

I've been using Comet as my main browser for a few weeks now, and I do like the Perplexity AI search, but sometimes I do just want to do a quick image search, so I'll visit Google for what I find familiar.

You can find the browser at perplexity.ai/comet.

Alexa+

If you have a new Alexa device, or are an Amazon Prime customer, you have probably been invited to upgrade to Alexa+, which is an upgraded version of Alexa with better comprehension and conversational qualities.

You'll notice the Alexa+ voice is different, and that the blue light stays on after your Alexa interaction is done. This blue light means Alexa+ is still listening to you and is available for a follow up question or to continue the conversation.

Keeping the conversation going is interesting.

I asked Alexa, "where can I find good pie in East Dallas" and she listed Humble Pie (my favorite) and Thunderbird Pies, which is a Detroit-style pizza restaurant.

When I pointed out her mistake, she immediately admitted I was right and then included another nearby bakery instead.

I usually ask her about the latest Dallas Stars hockey game. She tells me the score, then I ask who scored goals, and after that, I can ask how the Stars are doing in the standing and when is the next game. It's all very conversational, and it works well, but it is not perfect.

Alexa+ can even learn about you if you decide to let it know things like your birthday or what's on your calendar.

AI is undoubtedly going to be in all our futures. You should dip your toe in the AI waters and get used to how AI differs from traditional search engines.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.

GADGETS

Universal travel adapter is a game changer

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

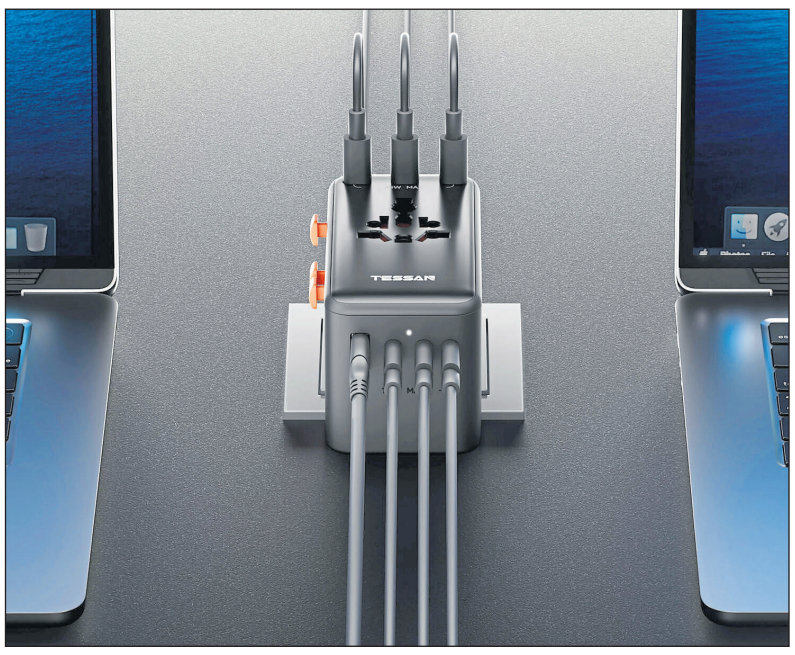
Tessan's Voyager 205 8-in-1 universal travel adapter is a game changer for frequent fliers. This pocket-sized adapter (3 by 2.16 by 2.20 inches; 11.8 ounces) features dual fast-charging modules that allow it to power up to eight devices simultaneously, one of the key reasons it's marketed as the world's most powerful travel adapter.

The eight charging outputs are powered by advanced GaN III Technology to ensure cool, safe charging. Safety features include dual-fuse protection, overcurrent and overvoltage protection, and temperature control.

The eight ports include a single universal AC outlet, six USB-C ports and one USB-A. Both a MacBook Pro (160 watts) and an iPad Pro (45 watts) can be charged together and get the needed power without any drop-off.

The portable power travel hub is a flame-retardant PC with a metallic black and silver finish and is listed as compatible with over 200 countries and regions. It features a spare fuse compartment and an LED indicator.

https://tessan.com/products/voyager-205, $119



Tessan / TNS

Tessan's Voyager 205 8-in-1 universal travel adapter is a game-changer for frequent fliers. This pocket-sized adaptor features dual fast-charging modules that allow it to power up to eight devices simultaneously.

The **Tribit PocketGo portable wireless speaker** packs surprisingly powerful sound for its size. Measuring just 4.25 by 3.18 by 1.65 inches/7.76 ounces, it can easily be tucked into a pocket or hung on a belt loop from the built-in attachment.

It has 7 watts of audio output from a 45mm driver and a passive radiator. An internal 2400mAh lithium-ion battery lasts up to 20 hours at 50 percent volume; a full USB-C charge takes about 3 hours. Travel and outdoor use are no problem with the PocketGo's IP68 waterproof and rustproof rating. U.S. military standard drop tests have it drop-proof from up to 1.33 yards.

While the sound from such a small speaker is the main attraction, with Bluetooth 6.0, you can pair and play two PocketGo speakers for authentic left-right channel stereo sound. It supports microSD card playback via its built-in reader, and with the Tribit app, you can adjust the audio to your liking with customizable and preset EQ modes. It also has a built-in microphone for hands-free calls.

https://tribit.com/products/tribit-pocketgo-portable-bluetooth-speaker, $34.99

Tribit / TNS

The Tribit PocketGo portable wireless speaker packs surprisingly powerful sound for its size.

By simply screwing in **PureEdge Lighting's A19 TruColor Smart Bulb**, you can instantly transform the atmosphere of any room or patio.

The company recently introduced a new, user-friendly consumer line of WiZ-connected smart bulbs and remote room controllers. With the 60-watt equivalent A19 TruColor bulb($16), there is no hub or wiring needed, just screw it into an existing light fixture, and the built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, along with the dedicated companion app, are all you need.

Once installed, it can be set to natural white light with a range of 1500K to 6500K. And if that's not enough, it offers over 16 million colors with TruColor RGBTW technology and over 85,000 shades of white. The app and WiZ Pro Dashboard on your computer have preset color modes, or you can choose your own. There's no right or wrong, it's just what works for you.

The Pure Smart Turnable White filament smart bulb ($24) is also a 60-watt equivalent and can be adjusted to white settings ranging from 2000K to 4000K. It also supports Wi-Fi and Bluetooth for communication with the WiZ Connected app. Both bulbs can be automated in the app with specific schedules to turn on or off. They are compatible with Alexa and Google Home voice controls.

The hub-free Smart Remote Room Controller ($40) runs on four AAA batteries and works with WiZ-connected smart accessories. The controller switch controls features such as color temperature and bulb intensity.

Obviously, the bulbs are easy to install. If you have electrical experience, the room controller will be simple. Hiring a licensed electrician is always recommended.

https://www.pureedgelighting.com

Contact Gregg Ellman at greggellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @greggellman.

PureEdge / TNS

By simply screwing in PureEdge Lighting's new A19 TruColor Smart Bulb, you can instantly transform the atmosphere of any room or patio.

Why it's so hard to tell if a piece of text was written by AI – even for AI

By AMBUJ TEWARI
University of Michigan
(The Conversation)

THE CONVERSATION

People and institutions are grappling with the consequences of AI-written text. Teachers want to know whether students' work reflects their own understanding; consumers want to know whether an advertisement was written by a human or a machine.

Writing rules to govern the use of AI-generated content is relatively easy. Enforcing them depends on something much harder: reliably detecting whether a piece of text was generated by artificial intelligence.

Some studies have investigated whether humans can detect AI-generated text. For example, people who themselves use AI writing tools heavily have been shown to accurately detect AI-written text. A panel of human evaluators can even outperform automated tools in a controlled setting. However, such expertise is not widespread, and individual judgment can be inconsistent. Institutions that need consistency at a large scale therefore turn to automated AI text detectors.

The problem of AI text detection

The basic workflow behind AI text detection is easy to describe. Start with a piece of text whose origin you want to determine. Then apply a detection tool, often an AI system itself, that analyzes the text and produces a score, usually expressed as a probability, indicating how likely the text is to have been AI-generated. Use the score to inform downstream decisions, such as whether to impose a penalty for violating a rule.

This simple description, however, hides a great deal of complexity. It glosses over a number of background assumptions that need to be made explicit. Do you know which AI tools might have plausibly been used to generate the text? What kind of access do you have to these tools? Can you run them yourself, or inspect their inner workings? How much text do you have? Do you have a single text or a collection of writings gathered over time? What AI detection tools can and cannot tell you depends critically on the answers to questions like these.

There is one additional detail that is especially important: Did the AI system that generated the text deliberately embed markers to make later detection easier?

These indicators are known as watermarks. Watermarked text looks like ordinary text, but the markers are embedded in subtle ways that do not reveal themselves to casual inspection. Someone with the right key can later check for the presence of these markers and verify that the text came from a watermarked AI-generated source. This approach, however, relies on cooperation from AI vendors and is not always available.

How AI text detection tools work

One obvious approach is to use AI itself to detect AI-written text. The idea is straightforward. Start by collecting a large corpus, meaning collection of writing, of examples labeled as human-written or AI-generated, then train a model to distinguish between the two. In effect, AI text detection is treated as a standard classification problem, similar in spirit to spam filtering. Once trained, the detector examines new text and predicts whether it more closely resembles the AI-generated examples or the human-written ones it has seen before.

The learned-detector approach can work even if you know little about which AI tools might have generated the text. The main requirement is that the training corpus be diverse enough to include outputs from a wide range of AI systems.

But if you do have access to the AI tools you are concerned about, a different approach becomes possible. This second strategy does not rely on collecting large labeled datasets or training a separate detector. Instead, it looks for statistical signals in the text, often in relation to how specific AI models generate language, to assess whether the text is likely to be AI-generated. For example, some methods examine the probability that an AI model assigns to a piece of text. If the model assigns an unusually high probability to the exact sequence of words, this can be a signal that the text was, in fact, generated by that model.

Finally, in the case of text that is generated by an AI system that embeds a watermark, the problem shifts from detection to verification. Using a secret key provided by the AI vendor, a verification tool can assess whether the text is consistent with having been generated by a watermarked system. This approach relies on information that is not available from the text alone, rather than on inferences drawn from the text itself.

Limitations of detection tools

Each family of tools comes with its own limitations, making it difficult to declare a clear winner. Learning-based detectors, for example, are sensitive to how closely new text resembles the data they were trained on. Their accuracy drops when the text differs substantially from the training corpus, which can quickly become outdated as new AI models are released. Continually curating fresh data and retraining detectors is costly, and detectors inevitably lag behind the systems they are meant to identify.

Statistical tests face a different set of constraints. Many rely on assumptions about how specific AI models generate text, or on access to those models' probability distributions. When models are proprietary, frequently updated or simply unknown, these assumptions break down. As a result, methods that work well in controlled settings can become unreliable or inapplicable in the real world.

Watermarking shifts the problem from detection to verification, but it introduces its own dependencies. It relies on cooperation from AI vendors and applies only to text generated with watermarking enabled.

More broadly, AI text detection is part of an escalating arms race. Detection tools must be publicly available to be useful, but that same transparency enables evasion. As AI text generators grow more capable and evasion techniques more sophisticated, detectors are unlikely to gain a lasting upper hand.

Hard reality

The problem of AI text detection is simple to state but hard to solve reliably. Institutions with rules governing the use of AI-written text cannot rely on detection tools alone for enforcement.

As society adapts to generative AI, we are likely to refine norms around acceptable use of AI-generated text and improve detection techniques. But ultimately, we'll have to learn to live with the fact that such tools will never be perfect.

Ambuj Tewari is a professor of statistics at the University of Michigan.

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HOME&GARDEN

A small office is made to feel open and bright through the use of mirrors.
Scott Gabriel Morris / TNS

A small office is enhanced by small scale furnishings.
Handout / TNS

AFFORDABLE TIPS FOR *small* SPACES

By CATHY HOBBS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Designing a small space can be challenging, but with the right approach, even the most compact room can be made to feel open, airy and larger than its size.

The key is to avoid common design pitfalls such as overwhelming a room with too much color, pattern or oversized furniture and instead focus on timeless design techniques that help maximize flow, light and proportion.

By embracing neutral palettes, thoughtful furniture placement, layered textures and smart lighting, you can transform a small space into one that feels larger and more functional.

Common mistakes

One of the biggest mistakes that one can make especially as it relates to small spaces is to overwhelm it with color and pattern. Neutral color palettes, layered textures and natural materials have stood the test of time because they work in any environment and can evolve with small updates and blend well with nearly any décor. Classic design foundations, solid lighting, balance and proportion will never go out of style.

Handout / TNS

Neutral colors such as black, white and cream help to make a windowless room feel larger.

Tips for making a small room feel bigger

Furniture placement is key. Furniture should enhance not overwhelm a space. Often in small interiors, less is more. It is critical to allow for furniture placement that encourages conversation and flow as well. Be sure not to block pathways or entrances and allow a room to breathe.

Colors that enhance

Neutrals and muted tones such as pastels, off-white and light gray can be by themselves or layered in a space to add depth and interest without closing in a space or making it feel small.

Opt for more subtle design techniques such as an accent wall over the popular "color drenching" trend. Accent walls are powerful as far as making a design statement but tend to just add a "pop of color" as opposed to an overall color experience.

Affordable Ideas

Let there be light. Lighting can be a key to making a small space feel larger. This is not where you will want to skimp. Look for opportunities to infuse purposeful lighting such as table lamps, floor lamps and pendants. An affordable and readily available option is a local big box or hardware store, you will find lots of options – and be sure you leave with the right bulbs!

Furniture selections

Consider including smaller scale items such as stools, benches, ottomans and side tables. These items are often "cash and carry" at retail stores for national brands and often allow you to furnish a space at an approachable cost.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."

What can I do about frozen gutters?

Frozen gutters are more than just a winter nuisance; they're a warning sign. When you see those long, gleaming icicles hanging from the eaves, it usually means water is backing up somewhere it shouldn't. Left alone, that ice can warp gutters, tear them off the house, or even trigger roof leaks and full-blown ice dams. The good news: You have options for prevention, and a few choices for dealing with frozen gutters once they arrive.

Angie Hicks
Ask Angi

Before anything else, fight the temptation to hack away at the ice with a hammer, shovel or anything else from the garage. Every spring, gutter pros shake their heads at the dents, cracks and bent panels caused by well-meaning homeowners. Ice is stubborn, and brute force causes far more damage than it prevents.

Once your gutters are frozen solid, the reality is that your best solution may be patience. There are services that can thaw gutters using steam or hot-water equipment, but expect to pay a few hundred dollars for something that may only provide temporary relief. If the temperatures stay low or you're dealing with a chronic freeze point, the ice can return within days.

Christian Delbert / Dreamstime / TNS

Once your gutters are frozen solid, the reality is that your best solution may be patience. There are services that can thaw gutters using steam or hot-water equipment, but expect to pay a few hundred dollars for something that may only provide temporary relief.

For a long-term fix, look at heating systems designed specifically for gutters and downspouts. These systems use cables or panels to warm the metal just enough to keep water flowing. They're effective and reliable, and priced accordingly. Depending on the size of your home and layout of the gutter system, installation usually runs between $500 and $1,000.

Skip the salt and chemical shortcuts. Melting products that work on driveways can corrode roofing materials, stain gutters and wash harmful runoff into your yard. They're not recommended by roofers, gutter installers or landscapers.

If water has already crept under the shingles or you see signs of leaks inside the house, call a pro immediately. Once moisture gets past the roof surface, you're in a race against time to prevent further damage.

The best strategy to prevent frozen gutters is the simplest: Keep your gutters clear. Hire a professional gutter cleaner twice a year (usually once in spring and once in fall) to remove debris that traps water. Downspouts clogged with leaves or twigs are the primary cause of winter freeze-ups. A clean pipe allows water to fall straight through before it can solidify.

Next, take a look at the attic. Homes with warm, poorly insulated attics are prime candidates for ice dams. Heat escaping upward melts snow on the roof, and that water refreezes right at the colder gutter line. A contractor can evaluate your insulation and ventilation and help prevent these freeze-thaw cycles.

Finally, remember that none of this is DIY territory. Working on ladders or rooftops in winter conditions is dangerous, even for experienced pros. Whoever you hire, whether for cleaning, insulation work or thawing, should carry the appropriate state or local licensing along with both liability and workers' compensation insurance. If they don't, you could be legally and financially responsible for injuries on your property.

Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column.

TRAVEL

Passengers board the Southwest Chief at Los Angeles Union Station.

Christopher Reynolds / Los Angeles Times / TNS

It's 43 hours from L.A. to Chicago

These train people like it that way

By CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

We were well into our journey from Los Angeles to Chicago, surrounded by cornfields and grain elevators, when the train halted and a voice rang out.

"All right, folks," said a man on the PA system. "We've come to a stop in what appears to be the middle of nowhere."

To a traveler in a hurry, this is the stuff of nightmares. To a seasoned passenger on the L.A.-Chicago train known as Amtrak's Southwest Chief, it's just another day.

When you board an American long-distance train in 2025, you are trading the airport routine for entry into a locomotive-driven realm where there is neither TSA nor WiFi. And AI might as well stand for aged infrastructure.

There will be delays, often because of passing freight trains. But in the bargain, you are freeing yourself from worry about aerodynamics or the chronic shortage of U.S. air traffic controllers and gaining access to ground-level scenery and idle hours.

You're also joining a modest trend. Even before this fall's bout of flight cancellations during the government shutdown, Amtrak had set records for passengers and revenue in fiscal 2024, then again in 2025. Ridership on the Southwest Chief rose 12.6 percent in the last year. Amtrak's long-distance trains haven't caught up with their pre-pandemic numbers yet, but we seem to like them a little more lately.

To learn why, I boarded the Southwest Chief at Los Angeles Union Station on a recent Monday afternoon. I was ready to see a few desert sunsets from the Sightseer Lounge and hear what people say when they have the time to chat with a stranger IRL.

Before long, I had been party to conversations about fear of flying, doctors in Tijuana, how to make beef jerky and how to sleep in a moving metal box. I'd also heard these sentences:

- "I like watching the country go by. I draw and I paint," said passenger Nancy Roeder.
- "I'm a fourth-generation model railroader," said William Angus.
- "I'm not going to lie to you. I took his life."

This last comment came from a fellow traveler, ruefully disclosing an act of self-defense many years ago. No proof was offered, but I believed it. I also found the teller of the story (whom I won't name) to be good company, thoughtful and generous.

In other words, on a two-day train, you meet people and hear things that you might not on a four-hour flight.

What Paul Theroux wrote 50 years ago in "The Great Railway Bazaar" is still true: "Anything is possible on a train: a great meal, a binge, a visit from card players, an intrigue, a good night's sleep, and strangers' monologues framed like Russian short stories."

Flagstaff by dawn

There's one Southwest Chief departure from Los Angeles every day (and one from Chicago). If everything goes right, the 2,265-mile, 32-stop trip takes about 43 hours.

But only a rookie would count on that. About 60 percent of the time, the Southwest Chief arrives at least 15 minutes late.

Back in 1936, when the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway introduced Southwest Super Chief service between Los Angeles and Chicago, this was a roughly 40-hour journey. The passenger list included plenty of show-biz people and the first stop was in Pasadena.

Nowadays, the Southwest Chief is run by Amtrak (which gets government funding but operates independently enough to be unaffected by recent government shutdowns). There are not so many show-biz people now, not as many frills. Instead of Pasadena, its first stop after Los Angeles is Fullerton, followed by a bend to the northeast. By the time I arrived in the dining car for my first dinner aboard, we were nearing Barstow.

"This way, young man," lied the server winningly as he steered me to a table. (I am 65. In the dining car, every traveler, no matter how aged, gets greeted as a young man or young lady.)

Since booths hold four people, dining car stewards like Chuck Jones manage the delicate task of putting travelers together. Through PA announcements and whispers in the aisles, he encouraged us to introduce ourselves and keep phones off tables.

He also suggested we steer clear of politics – a tall order when traveling through a government shutdown from a city the president had just called "lawless" to one he had just called "the worst and most dangerous city in the world."

Surprise: Almost everyone complied.

Over the course of six dining car meals as a solo traveler, I heard no political disagreements and met travelers from their 20s to their 80s.

Claudette Toth, a senior from Massachusetts, estimated that she'd only flown three or four times in her life. William Angus, a 24-year-old returning to Chicago from a pilgrimage to the San Diego Model Railroad Museum told of how much he loved running a 1/87 scale model of the Bakersfield-Mojave rail system, re-enacting operations from February 1953.

As Angus spoke, Ernie Haecker, a longtime train lover, nodded in understanding, grinning beneath a handlebar mustache. Haecker, 77, an audiologist, told us he takes the train every six weeks, splitting time between Santa Fe and New York. After so many trips, he knows the crew, knows where the train will pause long enough for him to shave, knows he can count on chatting with "a whole panoply of folks every time." He even knew the spot in Illinois where the train would switch from one old company's tracks to another's.

"We just left the old Santa Fe," he would say when the moment came. "Now we're on Burlington."

My dinner on the first night was another happy surprise – a fairly tender and flavorful flat iron steak. There was a vase holding flowers at every table, along with white tablecloth.

Still, nobody should expect a Michelin-star meal in an Amtrak dining car. It's common for servers to bring out dessert before the main dish (to avoid running behind later) and at one meal, someone forgot my order and I had to start over half an hour later.

By the time we crossed into Arizona that first night, I was back in my roomette nodding off, lulled like a baby atop a washing machine.

We were near Flagstaff when I blinked awake, glad to catch sight of the sunrise and grateful to have a sleeping area of my own.

Arizona sprawl and the Amtrak class system

Of the three ways you can travel long-distance on Amtrak, the fanciest option is a private room that's about 50 square feet (including private bath). The cost – about $3,200 for a couple, one way, when I booked – includes meals in the dining cars. (Family rooms, which hold four people but share bathrooms, cost about the same. All rates fluctuate by season and demand.)

That was too pricey for me and my expense account, so I booked a roomette. The roomettes are about half the size of a private room, with dining-car access and upper and lower berths that allow two travelers to lie flat (or one to spread out). These share toilets and showers. This cost me $809. (For a couple, the tab would have been $1,112.)

The third option was coach class, which means sleeping in your seat. It's a sensible choice if you're traveling only a portion of the route, and it's what I did when traveling this route as a college student 45 years ago.

I was intrigued to see that coach fares start at $198 – only a bit more than the starting price for a flight. But no, not intrigued enough.

As a coach passenger, you don't get access to the dining car (unless there's room and you're willing to pay $20-$45 for a meal). Instead, you bring food, buy snacks in the cafe car below the Sightseer Lounge or, if truly desperate, try to arrange a restaurant delivery to an upcoming fresh-air stop.

Fortunately, all classes get access to the Sightseer Lounge, where armchairs and couches face big windows. I've heard of lounges getting pretty crowded and ripe on heavily booked trips, but our trained seemed less than half-full. A few coach passengers dozed in the lounge overnight (which is officially forbidden) and nobody seemed bothered.

That first morning, with coffee in hand, I tiptoed into the lounge, sank into an armchair and watched the desert sprawl while wispy clouds clung to the horizon under a brightening sky.

This postcard (or rather Instagram) moment came somewhere between Winslow and Holbrook. I'm told the scenery is more dramatic on the Coast Starlight (from Los Angeles to Seattle) and the California Zephyr (from Emeryville through the Rockies to Chicago). But this comes down to taste. If you like deserts, the Chief is hard to beat. (Though no matter the route, if you like photography, the train is a challenge: no open windows, so you're always shooting exteriors through glass.)

As Arizona yielded to New Mexico, the dirt seemed to get redder and the ridges rose to form buttes. Along rivers and creeks, bright yellow cottonwood trees congregated in bursts of yellow. Occasionally we'd glimpse small towns and timeworn roadside attractions – a reminder that Old Route 66 basically follows Southwest Chief's path between the West Coast and Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Amish in transit, elk at sunset

"Living in L.A., you forget all this space," said Kim Rinauro, a nurse from Los Feliz. "When you come out and see how vast this is, it really gives you a different perspective."

"America is so ginormous," said Jeanine Bass, a softball coach from Costa Mesa who was on her way to see family in upstate New York.

Meanwhile, one end of the observation car had been filled by several women in white bonnets, joined by men with straw hats, footlong beards and no mustaches. Occasionally I'd hear a sort of clapping sound. Amish families. Playing dominoes.

Amish travelers have been using this route for decades, one of the men told me, on their way to and from doctors in Tijuana. Seeking medical treatment that's more affordable and easier to schedule than in the U.S., they take trains to Southern California, then continue overland across the border.

Just before we made a 45-minute stop at the station, which is surrounded by a grim neighborhood, an Amtrak staffer took the microphone to sternly address the coach-class travelers.

"Coaches: No alcohol," she said. "If you bring alcohol, you can stay and spend all night here with the transients." For those in rooms and roomettes, she continued, booze in private rooms is OK, but not in public spaces.

Farther into New Mexico, we passed the other Southwest Chief train, carrying passengers west.

Between Raton, New Mexico, and Trinidad, Colorado, amid a gaudy sunset, we crept past a herd of elk, then plunged into a tunnel. Emerging, we caught a last bit of sunset, some of the most gorgeous miles of the trip.

Yet this, I learned later, is the part of the trip that Amtrak's chief executive tried to replace with bus service in 2018. The effort failed and that executive is no longer in the job. But the battles in Washington over Amtrak funding and mission never end, which is why so many cars, like the Superliners on the Southwest Chief, were built between 1979 and 1996. Amtrak leaders have set a goal of replacing their older long-distance cars by 2032.

Speaking of hardware: Eventually I tried the shower. It didn't go well. First, I saw that someone had stolen the shampoo dispenser. Then I couldn't find a way to cool the scalding-hot water. I stood as far back as I could in the snug compartment and grimaced my way through it.

Missouri, Iowa and Illinois: The final miles

On arrival day, I woke just as we reached the station in Kansas City, another gritty neighborhood along the tracks. Our news feeds were filled with fresh reports of nationwide flight delays because of the government shutdown.

Soon we were crossing the Missouri River, roaring through forest and skirting naked farmland where this year's corn crop had just been cut. Then came Fort Madison, Iowa; the Mississippi River and the beginnings of Illinois. Water towers and grain elevators.

I zipped my bags shut, tipped the roomette attendant and dining car team. Soon I'd be stretching my legs at the Art Institute of Chicago, walking Millennium Park and along the Chicago River, checking out the skyline from Navy Pier.

We pulled into Union Station within an hour of our target time.

Was it a perfect trip? No. But it was full of humanity, scenery and comforting clangs and rumbles. I even liked the lurching way you had to walk down the corridors, adjusting balance as the train shifts. And then, to step off the train after two days into a brisk Chicago afternoon, 2,265 miles from home, having never left the ground? That's almost magic.

TRAVEL TIPS

Can you earn credit card rewards on train travel?

It's easy to earn credit card rewards on train travel, even if you don't have an Amtrak-branded credit card. Nearly all rewards credit cards offer at least 1 point or mile per dollar spent on train tickets, and many credit cards offer boosted rewards rates for travel purchases like airlines, cruises and trains.

How to earn rewards on train travel

To earn rewards on train travel, you'll need a credit card that offers rewards in that category, plus loyalty programs to earn rewards with popular train networks.

Use the right rewards credit card

Many of today's top travel credit cards and top cash back credit cards reward train travel. Even if the reward structure doesn't specifically mention trains by name, you may still earn rewards on train purchases – especially if the card rewards general travel purchases, which would include Amtrak trains and other passenger railways.

Earn rewards for your daily commute

Train travel doesn't have to be limited to passenger train railways. Many credit cards also cover "public transit" as part of their general travel category, so you can earn rewards for taking your city's light rail or subway, too.

Join Amtrak Guest Rewards

You'll get more out of your train travel if you join a railway rewards program. If you do most of your train travel in the United States, this means signing up for Amtrak Guest Rewards.

By Nicole Dieker / Bankrate.com (TNS)